

Bhanthe
Sankichcha

Learning
From
Others



A Dhamma Talk and
Reflective Journal

Learning from Others:

A Dhamma Talk
And Reflective Journal

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And Reflective Journal

Bhanthe Sankichcha



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Cover Image:

The image on the cover of the book combines Kazumasa Ogawa's lotus from his *Some Japanese Flowers* (1895) with a photograph of Priests of Zen Shu (1870)

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Dr. Steven Fischer not only consistently supported the development of this book but assisted in the creation of Ehipassiko Press even before it had a name.

When Ehipassiko Press was still a fledgling idea, over coffee at Café Even in Farmington Hills, Michigan, Harrison Capron suggested that we publish a book by Bhante Sankichcha. Harrison's suggestion took root. Bhante Sankichcha's *Learning from Others* became our first book. Over that same cup of coffee, Harrison suggested that we publish a series of Dhamma talks. It seemed a crazy, unrealistic idea at the time, but we launched the press with "The Dhamma Talk and Reflective Journal Series" to do just that.

Dawn Lemon served as editor for *Learning from Others*. Her suggestions, especially those concerning how to develop the questions for inquiry, not only made this book better but will improve future publications, even those in which she might not be personally involved.

Josselyn Moore has encouraged the development of Ehipassiko Press from the beginning and contributed her skills as the copy editor for *Learning from Others*.

INTRODUCTION

Learning from Others is the first book in Ehipassiko Press' "A Dhamma Talk and Reflective Journal Series." Each book in the series is set up as a journal that begins with a Dhamma talk followed by questions for inquiry designed to help you reflect on the content of the talk and how to apply the concepts covered in the talk to your own spiritual growth and development.

Learning from Others is also the first book published by Ehipassiko Press. We are grateful to Bhante Sankichcha for trusting us with his beautiful insights as well as for others who have donated their time and talents to bring this—and the Ehipassiko Press—to fruition. We look forward to publishing more high-quality books that make a positive impact on people's lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven Berg". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Steven L. Berg, PhD
Publisher
Ehipassiko Press



Ceylon Buddhist monk and his pupils.

LEARNING FROM OTHERS

Learning from others is a very interesting topic and a very important part of our human life experience. In fact, our life is about learning. We can always learn something from others.

When it comes to our spiritual practice, learning is very essential, very important. To learn from others, we first need to think about our own life experience. Who are we? What are we at this moment? How much has this learning contributed to our present state of life? We have to deeply appreciate our life.

If we can identify techniques for learning from

others, we can understand how important, how essential learning from others is for our life, for our progress, for our success in every aspect of our life. If we are able to learn from others, life can be very easy.

According to my understanding, my observation, even my practical experience, it's very easy for us to be good, even to be positive and successful if we can simply learn from others for our own wellbeing. But not everybody can do that. It's not that easy. Not many people are ready to learn from others. For some people, it can be very difficult, very difficult to learn from others for many reasons.

How can we learn from others? What are the conditions that we should have for our behavior in order for us to learn? Do you have any thoughts on that? What are the special qualities that we need to have to easily learn from others? Do you have any ideas?

One thing that is very essential is for us to be humble. For us to easily learn from others, we have to be humble. This is not the case for many people. For many people, if they are arrogant, if they have conceit, they are not ready to listen. They don't really appreciate any good thing in others. They don't learn from them. If they can let go of their *māna*, their conceit, they can use Buddhist

psychotherapy to identify their arrogance and then eliminate it.

It's a very important point that, for us to be able to learn from others, we must eliminate the ego. The ego is directly connected to conceit and arrogance. If we are ego-centered, if we are really deeply selfish and we have a big ego, we are not ready to learn from others. The ego can definitely be the root of many negativities. We have to control our ego above anything else.

Something else is that we have to be good listeners. If we are not ready to listen humbly, we cannot learn from others. There can be so many teachers, so many wise people around you, but if you don't know how to listen, how to pay mindful attention, you will never be able to learn. This is very important. You have to be a very good listener. So listening is a very special skill, a good quality.

Even though we listen to so many people, we sometimes don't really learn that much. Like, when you hear things again and again repeatedly. You get the notion, you get the feeling that, "I know this already." So, you don't pay clear, mindful attention to what is being said. We have to let go of our previous knowledge of the concept and ideas if we are to learn from others. We need to pay our full attention, and only then can we clearly, perfectly

listen or hear what is being transferred, what is being said.

Listening is very special. So, it can be a somewhat tricky issue because we cannot easily let go of our knowledge, our understanding of our previous experiences. When we listen to someone, we always compare. But if you do that comparison at the moment you begin to listen, you may not be able to completely get what is being said. You can easily miss important points. If you can simply listen with an empty mind, you can completely grasp what is being said—listening is a very special skill in the dhamma way.

So what are the other conditions that would be helpful for us to learn from others? One is that we should be courteous. That means, when we listen to someone, we must participate in that listening with respect and appreciation. Then, we can easily listen to others and learn from them. You can see how these things are connecting to the dhamma, of having less ego.

At the same time, if we are not sensitive enough, that is also something that can prevent us from learning from others. That sensitivity, that receptiveness in our mind and our behavior has a special faculty that is very important to understand. Because sometimes it happens to us where we do

not understand.

Parents can advise children and give them necessary instructions, but the children don't always get it. That means that they don't feel it, they don't get it, they don't understand it. They are not sensitive. That can happen to anyone. It can be hard for anyone to learn from others.

There is a very special thing taught in one stanza in the *Dhammapada* that clearly explains that, in the spiritual path, we have to be like the tongue, not like a spoon.

If a fool be associated with a wise man even all his life, he will perceive the truth as little as a spoon perceives the taste of soup. If an intelligent man be associated for one minute only with a wise man, he will soon perceive the truth, as the tongue perceives the taste of soup.

Even though you stir the curry with the spoon, the spoon is never able to taste the curry. It doesn't taste anything. But the tongue is very sensitive to any taste. So, therefore, it explains in the Dhamma we have to be like tongues. That means that we have to be very sensitive to everything around us. That way, we can easily learn from others.

Sensitivity is a very unique quality. It's not the same

for everybody. That capacity that we have is a special quality, a unique quality found in different levels depending on many circumstances such as our practice, our predispositions, the level of our education, maybe some spiritual practices. These kinds of circumstances are there and cause our sensitivity and receptiveness to be different from person to person. There can be so many things around us, but we can never learn from them if we are not sensitive. Therefore, this spiritual practice, especially the mindfulness practices are the ultimate way to make us very sensitive, very receptive to all those around us. So that is the way to learn from others very easily.

Of course, we can see that one's level of education, maybe knowledge, is also very important. The education, the learning, gives us such a discipline, gives us such a wonderful quality of listening.

An uneducated person is not ready to listen to others. Our educations, our trainings, all these things can influence that quality of learning from others. The wonderful thing to remember is that we have to be like our tongue, not like a spoon.

You could have so many good people, positive people, influential people around you. You can live in such a perfect environment. But if you are not sensitive, you may not be able to learn anything. So

there is no progress or success in your life.

Another thing is “from whom can you learn?” Who do you admire? When you think about that point, as it is emphasized in the Dhamma, we always admire good spiritual people but there are also positive friends and other people around us, those with healthy relationships around us. We can easily learn from them.

My feeling is that we should always live with someone who is advanced compared with ourselves. It's a blessing, actually, if we can live with someone that is a teacher, a very experienced one who has a lot of life experiences, knowledge, understanding, spiritual experience. We can easily learn from them.

It's a common understanding to admire these positive friends, figures, and individuals that we can learn from. While it's very important to see that, it is not only these higher people, visual people, advanced people that we learn things from. Sometimes, for this learning, there's no age limit.

I have heard from some of my friends who have told me that they learned so many things from their kids. Just by observing how little kids are feeling, interacting, their way of thinking, we can learn so many things. We can learn about our behavior, our thoughts, our reactions, our feelings towards

incidents and other circumstances.

Sometimes children ask very sensitive questions, as they are getting exposed to this world for the very first time. They directly experience the world and they can gain such understanding of what they experience. Therefore, we can learn so many things from the minors, the little ones.

For parents, they can learn so many things from their kids. It is not only the adults, the advanced people from whom we learn. That's my point. We learn so many things from people individually that we would not really acknowledge.

So, don't you think you can learn so many things from your pets? What do you think? You may have some experience with pets. Have you learned anything from pets?

One thing that we can learn from our pets is unconditional love. I think that's a very common thing that we can learn. It is so complicated even to watch and observe how these pets share their unconditional love and the so many other good qualities, beautiful qualities, wonderful qualities that they have.

Sometimes you may not find these qualities in human beings: the gratefulness, the humbleness, the love, the being there for you. Sometimes you

cannot get that from human beings. It's very complicated, a very complex nature to observe.

We can learn so many things from animals, especially today as human nature, human behavior, is commonly declining and being so corrupted. We can see some unique qualities still maintained in the animal kingdom. Surprising to see that there are so many good qualities that we can observe on so many occasions, so many experiences that we can see and we can observe in animals. We can learn so many things from pets and other animals as well.

What about nature? Things that we learn don't have to be from people, from animals. We can learn so many things from nature. Going back to that sensitivity we spoke about, if we are very receptive, very sensitive, very attentive by paying mindful attention to nature, we can learn so many things. We learn how things are happening. How things are. How they come to exist and how they fall apart. It's a wonderful thing, actually, to learn from nature.

Many enlightened disciples, even during the time of the Buddha, as they were practicing this mindfulness insight meditation, as they were cultivating their brain, as they were so receptive, so mindfully attentive, observed these natural phenomena which were helpful to them to attain enlightenment. Because the real Dhamma can

manifest in these natural phenomena, you can easily reflect on a deep Dhamma in these natural conditions. For me, from my personal experience, the water is a natural phenomenon, a wonderfully beautiful experience that can easily purify my heart, my mind. So, there can be a wonderful experience near water.

Flowers. Trees. These are beautiful, natural phenomena. The world of nature leads to a spiritual mind, to an awakening even. If you are deeply sensitive to these things, you learn so many beautiful lessons. So, we can learn from nature, the things that happen to surround us, if we pay our mindful attention.

As we spoke about earlier, we learn from others. Those who are good. Those who are very well experienced. Those who are positive. But what about negative people? Do we learn anything from negative people? Bad people in the world? What do you think?

From negative people, we can sometimes learn what not to do and how not to be. Why are they wrong? Why are these things bad? Sometimes we don't see the bad, the negativity that we are engaged in because we hardly criticize our own behavior, the negativity in ourselves. But we easily notice the wrong behavior and negativities in

others. It is a very common, basic human nature that we more easily notice negativities in others than in ourselves. We can clearly see why something is bad in another person. Why it is wrong. Why it is negative. We can easily learn from them.

Instead of getting angry or creating any negative emotions toward negative people, if we can be very sensitive and mindful to that negativity, we can learn so many things from them. Therefore, we have to appreciate them, too.

My point is, how can you learn about loving kindness without having an angry person in your life? Imagine if there is someone who is very difficult to deal with. This is where, as a spiritual person, you can learn about the importance of loving kindness.

Maybe you are not an angry person, but you clearly understand why this anger is bad and negative. How frustrating it can be to live with such a person, an individual, a relationship unless you can easily understand how you can learn about the importance of loving kindness without having that antagonism? For that reason, you have to be thankful to that person. You need to have these negative aspects in life to acknowledge and appreciate the positive things.

It is not always that we learn good things when all positive things are happening. That's right. We learn so many things when negative experiences are happening to us in our life.

Think about your life experience. What are the essential things, very important, valuable things you learned in your life. Maybe you faced a difficult time, problematic situation, or disastrous time. Maybe someone said goodbye to you in your family, in your life. It was a very painful, negative experience. But for some people, this can be a huge eye-opening experience, a spiritual experience. It's an experience which can give them a huge insight, huge understanding about the true meaning of life.

Our normal attitude towards our negativities is that they're not that good. We just want to be free from negativities. But they are inevitable. There's no life without them. Therefore, somehow, we have to develop an attitude to learn from negative people for our benefit, for our positive transformation. If we become very sensitive and mindful instead of getting consumed by these negative, painful experiences, we can use the experience as a way to allow the success of our understanding.

When we think about this point, we can basically learn from everyone without exception if we are very mindful, receptive, and sensitive. Otherwise,

all these good, deep lessons can go unnoticed. It's our duty to be in that state, to be able to learn.

Finally, another important thing is that we can learn from the past. When we practice meditation, when we talk about the value of being in the present moment, we are letting go of the past, letting go of the future. But how many things are there that we can learn from the past?

The negative side is we can emotionally get attached to our past. If we are lingering in the past emotionally, we are missing the beautiful moments in the present moment. That is wrong. But if we can mindfully, wisely reflect on our past experiences, we learn so many things. So, really, I think we all learn from the past. We learn lessons just by critically thinking, analyzing, understanding what went wrong. Which decision was wrong? It is most important not to make that mistake again, not permit any wrong behavior again. That is the real way to progress. In mindfully and deeply and wisely reflecting on our past experiences, we learn so many things.

As I said earlier, life can be very easy if we can simply learn from others constantly, just by humbly listening to others, being mindfully attentive to them. We can learn so many things that are beneficial to us.

In this spiritual journey, learning from others is a very important thing. It is not easy for many people because of the negative human existence. It is not easy, but, as we move along the path, we cultivate these spaces, these practices, these qualities so that we can naturally become able to learn from others. That's a wonderful thing to do as a human being, to learn from others.



LACE MAKERS, CEYLON.

Postcard showing Ceylon woman talking while making lace.

QUESTIONS FOR INQUIRY

This book was designed as a journal with plenty of room to reflect on the questions in the book itself. Prompts are provided at the top of each of the following pages, prompts you can use or ignore.

Writing out our reflections can be important because the process of writing makes us more likely to be honest with ourselves.

Am I ready to learn from others?

What might make learning from others difficult for me?

How can I learn from others?

What are the conditions that I should have in mind for my behavior in order to learn from others?

What are the special qualities that I need to have to easily learn from others?

In what ways am I humble enough to learn from others?

In what ways am I so arrogant or conceited that learning from others is difficult?

How is my ego directly connected to my conceit and arrogance?

In what ways can I work to eliminate my arrogance or conceit?

In what ways am I a good listener? How do I listen humbly?

What prevents me from learning from the people I listen to?

What can I do to pay my full attention to someone?

How can I empty my mind so that I can completely grasp what is being said to me?

What are the other conditions that would be helpful for me to learn from others?

In what ways do I fail to practice sensitivity when listening to others?

How do I practice sensitivity in listening to others?

In what ways am I like the spoon who stirs the
curry?

In what ways am I like the tongue who tastes the curry?

Think of a specific case in which you **did not** listen well. Ask yourself “How did the many circumstances of my life such as my dhamma practice, my predispositions, or the level of my education contribute to my not listening well.”

Think of a specific case in which you **did** listen well. Ask yourself “How did the many circumstances of my life such as my dhamma practice, my predispositions, or the level of my education contribute to my not listening well.”

How does my mindfulness practice make me more sensitive so that I am a better listener?

Who are some of the good people, positive people, influential people around me? What can I learn from them?

Are the people I live with good teachers? What can I learn from them?

What have I learned from my children or younger kids I interact with?

What have I learned from my pets? How do you practice these qualities in my life?

What have I learned by observing other animals?
How do I practice these qualities in my life?

Is there anything I have found in pets or other animals that I have not found in human beings?

How have I been mindfully attentive in nature?

In what way do I see the dhamma reflected in nature or some aspect of nature such as water, trees, flowers?

What have I learned from nature? How do I practice these qualities in my life?

What have I learned from the negative, unskillful people in the world? Can I see any of the negativity in myself?

Instead of getting angry, how can I appreciate a negative person in my life?

Think of a person who is negative, who practices unskillful behavior. What can I learn from that person? How can that person help improve my life?

What can I learn about loving kindness without having an angry person in my life?

Think of a difficult time, a problematic situation you experienced. As yourself, “What did I learn from it?”

What eye opening insights have I experienced as a result of being in a difficult, problematic situation?

How did being in a difficult, problematic situation help me grow spiritually?

How can I develop an attitude to learn from the inevitable negative, problematic experiences and people in my life?

What can I do to develop a more mindful, receptive, and sensitive attitude to better deal with the negativities I encounter?

What can I learn from my past?

When reflecting on my past, how can I avoid lingering in the past emotionally?

Think of a specific decision that went wrong in your past. Ask yourself, “What lessons can I learn just by critically thinking about, analyzing, understanding what went wrong? “What can I do to not make the same mistakes again?”



ABOUT EHIPASSIKO PRESS, LLC

Ehipassiko: Encouraging Investigation

Ehipassiko Press, LLC was started in June 2023 to publish Open Educational Resources (OERs) primarily in the fields of education, spirituality, and addiction recovery. Although not all our publications are Buddhist, we extend to all our books the Buddhist tradition of not selling Dhamma. Therefore, our books are published with a Creative Commons license and are released online for free.

In the spirit of OERs and not selling Dhamma, paperback editions of our books are offered through Amazon for cost of production. Neither our authors nor Ehipassiko Press receive royalties or other forms of compensation.

Please go to ehipassikopress.org for information about our other publications.

You may contact us at info@ehipassikopress.org.



ABOUT THE GREAT LAKES BUDDHIST VIHARA

The Great Lakes Buddhist Vihara (GLBV) is a Buddhist Monastery in the Theravada tradition, established in 1997 in the suburban Detroit area. GLBV provides services to the Great Lakes region, namely Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Ontario. Even though that Vihara is modeled after a typical Sri Lankan temple and run by Buddhist monks who are trained and ordained in Sri Lanka, the GLBV is for all who like to learn and practice Buddhism and meditation.

The GLBV provides free meditation classes, monthly Sil Days and other activities.

The GLBV is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bhante Sankichcha was born in Kandy, Sri Lanka in 1976. In 1991, at the age of 15, he entered the monastic life at Sri Subodhārāma International Monks' Training Institute in Kandy.

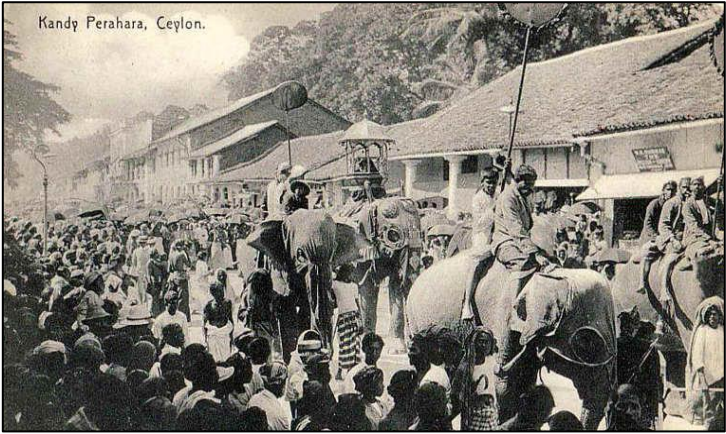
In 1996 Bhante Sankichcha received his higher ordination (upasampadā). The same year, he moved to Australia where he lived for four years conducting numerous mindfulness programs. In

2001 he was invited to the Great Lakes Buddhist Vihara in Michigan, United States of America to continue his Dhamma services. He currently serves as the abbot of Great Lakes Buddhist Vihara.

Bhante Sankichcha received his BA degree in Psychology from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. He is currently enrolled in a master's degree in counseling psychology program at Oakland University.

He is engaged in many social and religious services both locally and internationally. As a meditation and Dhamma teacher, Bhathhe Sankichcha provides Buddhist spiritual counseling to many people including young people and adults.

He has taught meditation and the Dhamma in Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Canada, and the United States of America.



Kandy Pera Hera Buddhist Procession

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

**A Dhamma Talk
and Reflective Journal Series**

Learning From Others (July 2023)

by Bhante Sankichcha

Five Factors for Positive Growth (August 2023)

by Bhante Sankichcha

