

## Pleasing the Teacher

Pleasing mummy; pleasing daddy; pleasing teacher : teacher's pet. It goes a long way back - seeking approval. As children, it's part of how our self-esteem or lack of it is developed. But it is a hindrance in vipassana.

My vipassana teachers often complained that meditators weren't 'honest'. What they meant was that they exaggerated either way, playing down or playing up what they had experienced.

Of course, the teacher may also be at fault. They may also be looking for praise. They may also be overly attracted to a sort of person. It may even be an erotic or romantic attraction. This too can be a hindrance and in the worse case, if one is a victim, it is best to leave. Of course, if it slips into unwholesome action then that ought to be reported.

But leaving aside the multitude of transgressions a teacher is capable of, what is their Dhamma job. I can only speak for myself here. I see my own work akin to a driving instructor.

On reflection, my instructor was very good indeed. He didn't waste time 'describing' what to do. As soon as I got into the car we were off. At first he instructed me on every move and as I repeated it and he became confident, he simply began to say where to go. 'Turn right at the lights'. 'Stop and do a three point turn'. (Three points? Some chance!)

But every so often he would ask, 'What have you forgotten?' 'Ah yes, the hand-break'. Or he might ask, 'Did you look into the mirror?' 'Sorry!' And sometimes make an observation, 'This is one way street you're turning into.' 'Oops!' Of course, all the time he had control of the car. And I often remember him slowing me down – very Mahasi.

It was encouraging to have his 'you're doing ok'. He never gave me the impression he thought I was exceptional, though I thought I was. Nor do I remember saying to myself, 'Why is he picking on me?' For his instructions were never said with irritation.

When I asked him if he thought I would pass the test or not, he said I had a good chance, but something like 80% fail first time. He'd prepared me for the long haul, but had not doused all hope. As it was I passed, but I put that down to the hours my generous uncle spent with me driving his car around the back streets of Blackley, Manchester.

Eventually, the driving instructor made himself redundant and moved onto the next client. And I carried on driving. But the important point is that he was my instructor, not my examiner.

So the relationship we have with our teachers is fertile ground for observing old conditionings. When do we feel pride or anger or disappointment or anxiety and so on? Allowing those conditionings to arise and allowing them to enervate, we then raise gratitude for the teaching and offer metta to the teacher. In the Discourses, the Buddha calls our teachers, *kalyana mitta* – our good and kind friend. All Dhamma teachers are trying in their own way to echo and emulate the Buddha, the teacher of gods and humans.

The meditator's job is not to please the teacher, nor to seek their praise. Rather it is to follow instructions diligently and report back without exaggeration.

And as my core vipassana teacher, Sayadaw U Janaka, used to make very clear to me, 'Your job is to be aware'. Indeed 'moment to moment awareness is the secret of success'. That's it.

So raising that clear and specific commitment. Just this day! One day devoted to the practice of moment to moment mindfulness.