

The Gift of Dhamma: The Buddha's Words

By Upāsaka Sudatta

This evening's talk will begin with a discussion of two of the three gems, the Buddha and the Dhamma. In this talk I am going to use a specific definition of the Dhamma, and that is the discourses of the Buddha. They have come down to us in the Theravadan tradition in the Pāli Canon. And I am going to use a specific role of the Buddha, and that is as The Teacher, The Master.

In my view—and I would not be the only one who holds this view—when you take up this practice, you accept the Buddha as your Teacher. In the Buddhist tradition, there is the belief—and I subscribe to this belief—that no one in Buddhist history has had the breadth and depth of understanding of the Dhamma that the Buddha did. Even the Buddha's most gifted disciples like Sariputta, Moggallāna, Khema, and Uppalavaṇṇā—the latter of whom were nuns—it is believed did not have the full understanding of the Dhamma that the Buddha did. There are stories in the Pāli Canon that indicate this to be true.

Now I know that most and perhaps all of you have favorite teachers, and that is fine. However, I would like to posit that none of them have the full understanding of the Dhamma, no matter how gifted you may think them to be. I am in that situation as well. I have had many wonderful teachers. All of them have had something to contribute. But none of them have had everything to contribute. And once again I would like to posit that you think of the Buddha as your favorite teacher, the best and most important teacher, your root teacher. And not to be disparaging of any others, but it is my view that all others be thought of as teaching assistants, TA's.

So that is my first important point. Think of the Buddha himself to be your teacher.

My second important point is that the only way to know what the Buddha taught is by reading his discourses. And as a way of making this point, let me tell a story. I think that many of you have already heard or read this story, but it bears repeating.

I began to meditate in 1991, and for four years I did what I think a lot of people do. I practiced in all three major traditions, Tibetan Buddhism, two different Zen saṅghas, this tradition, insight meditation. I read scores of books, went to retreats, listened to endless Dhamma talks, and so on. I will bet that a lot of you can relate to this.

But after all that time, I could not make sense of it all. There were so many contradictions. There were things that simply didn't make sense to me. Teacher A argued one case and Teacher B argued the opposite case. In one Zen saṅgha they told me specifically not to read the Buddha's original discourses. They told me that they were repetitive and boring.

But I got tired of being told "the Buddha said this" or "the Buddha said that." I wanted to know what the Buddha actually said.

Serendipitously, in 1995, to some fanfare, Bhikkhu Bodhi published a new English translation of the Majjhima Nikāya, the "Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha." "Nikāya" means "collection." There are five nikāyas in the Pāli Canon. The first four are the important ones. And I think most people agree that the Majjhima Nikāya is the central work in the discourses of the Buddha.

So I bought a copy. It's big. The discourses are 1,000 pages, and there are another 200 pages of endnotes. It was a daunting task. As it turned out, despite all my practice, I knew little about the Dhamma, and I knew nothing about the India of the Buddha's time. I went slowly. I read all the endnotes without which I would not have understood anything. I wasn't used to the rhythms and cadences of the Pāli Canon.

It took me a year. But little by little, the Buddha's Dhamma opened itself up to me. I remember reading the last page of the last discourse. I had quite a feeling of satisfaction. I made it! I ran the marathon.

As I closed the cover to the book, two thoughts leapt into my mind. The first one is that the Buddha's teachings hung together like a beautiful piece of engineering. I am a retired engineer, and while I was not a civil engineer, I had this image in my mind of the Buddha's teachings being like a suspension bridge. I happen to love bridges because of their elegance. My favorite bridge is the famous Bunker

Hill Bridge in Boston. It seems like a crime that people drive across it. They should just look at it and appreciate it for its beauty.

And that is how I look at the Buddha's Dhamma. 19th century western scholars used two words to describe the teachings in the Pāli Canon, coherent and cogent. Coherence is what I just described. Like many of you, I grew up in a Christian household. I read the Bible. The Bible is full of contradictions and inconsistencies. Some passages are downright disturbing.

But I didn't find any of that in the Majjhima Nikāya. And I was quite overwhelmed by that. I still am.

But immediately following that thought was that what I had just read was not *anything* like what I had read or been taught previously. Two things stood out to me. One was the importance of rebirth in the Buddha's teaching. The other was the practice of jhāna. The Buddha himself said that samadhi, which is the eighth path factor, is, in fact, the practice of jhāna. And in all those years and all those books and retreats and Dhamma talks, I had not even heard the word.

This was a seminal moment in my life and in my practice. I went on to read the rest of the first four volumes in the Pāli Canon: the Dīgha Nikāya, the Saṃyutta Nikāya, and the Aṅguttara Nikāya. I went looking for teachers that taught in a way that was consistent with what I was reading. To this day, the only way in which I know you can learn the Dhamma is to do what I did and read the first four of the five nikāyas in the Pāli Canon.

And before I leave this topic, let me not disparage the fifth Nikāya, the Khuddaka Nikāya. "Khuddaka" means "minor" or "smaller," which is funny because it is as large as the first four Nikāyas combined. But so be it. The Khuddaka Nikāya contains 15 separate volumes, although the Burmese version of the Pāli Canon contains three additional volumes. However, I think most Buddhist scholars consider them to be suspect in some way, so I think for our purposes we can think in terms of 15 volumes.

Some of these volumes are quite interesting. My favorite is the "Dhammapada." It is a collection of poems. It even has a chapter called "Happiness," which I think is wonderful. I often recommend this to be the first volume you read because it goes down easily and

is fun. I have also recently had a couple people from the local meditation group tell me how much they enjoy the Theragāthā and the Therīgāthā. “Gāthā” means “poem” or “verse.” “Thera” means “elder” as in “elder monk” and “Therī” means “elder” as in “elder nun.”

And finally on this topic, I will mention that—as some of you know—I have been working on a project since 2017 to edit, annotate, and illustrate the Jātaka Tales. These are supposed to be stories of the Buddha’s previous lives. More likely, they are simply morality tales like Aesop’s Fables. The Jātaka Tales are how traditionally lay people learned about the teachings of the Buddha. They can be quite charming. In these stories the Buddha can be a bird or a deer or any creature. And there are lots of fun, fantastic, mythical-or not!-creatures like garudas, who are enormous birds who may be as tall as 400 feet, fairies, and ogres, and so on. I once told my son that Buddhists don’t read much science fiction or fantasy because they don’t have to.

To give you an idea of the size of the Canonical literature, the Dīgha Nikāya—the long discourses—is about 800 pages long, the Majjhima Nikāya is, as I said, about 1,000 pages long, the Saṃyutta Nikāya is about 2,000 pages long, and the Aṅguttara Nikāya is about 1,600 pages long. So the first four Nikāyas are about 5,200 pages long. The Khuddaka Nikāya—all 15 volumes—runs to about the same total length, about 5,000 pages. But the Jātaka Tales are the majority of this and run to about 3,200 pages. There are 547 Jātaka Tales in total.

OK. So that gives you a little overview of the Pāli Canon. You can see the [organization of the Canon](#) in the split screen. But let me make one final point before we move on, and that is that I think it is important to read the nikāyas cover-to-cover. It is tempting to read a few discourses here and there. That is a good way to support what you already believe. But there are no shortcuts to enlightenment, and you learn things by reading as much of the Pāli Canon as possible that you would not get otherwise.

Bhikkhu Bodhi has a book that is a selection of his chosen discourses. It is called “In the Buddha’s Words.” It is his idea of important discourses in the Canon. However, when I saw his list, I was quite surprised at what he had chosen. It isn’t even close to those I would

have selected. Now, Bhikkhu Bodhi has a PhD in philosophy. He is deeply influenced by later Theravadan thinking. He is an academic.

This isn't to say that my list would be right and his would be wrong. We all relate to the Dhamma in different ways. What I am doing is encouraging you to read all the discourses—especially the first four nikāyas—and come up with your own list. That is the important one.

So this probably sounds quite daunting. Well, it is, but no one said that gaining insight into the ultimate nature of life, the universe, and everything would be simple. OK. I'm kidding, sort of. But now let me try and give you some help on how to approach the task of reading the Buddhist Canonical literature. And just in case this point gets lost, in my view, if you commit to this practice, you accept the Buddha to be your teacher, and the only way to know what he taught is to read the Pāli Canon. So now let me go on to the second portion of this talk and describe how the Buddha's discourses were composed, memorized, and transmitted.

As far as we know, there was no writing at the time of the Buddha in India. In fact, recent scholarship has shown that after the Buddha died, there was this wonderful synergy between the Greeks—who got to India through Alexander the Great—and the Indian Buddhists. I saw a YouTube video in which a scholar said that Alexander the Great travelled with eight philosophers. As this scholar put it, "You never know when you might want to have an existential debate in the middle of a battle."

The Indian Buddhists appreciated the keen intellects, inquisitiveness, and philosophical tradition of the Greeks. And likewise, because of those qualities, the Greeks appreciated the Buddhists and their Dhamma. And it was the Greeks who created the first written versions of the Buddha's discourses.

But before the Greeks started to write things down, the India of the Buddha's time had a sophisticated oral literary tradition. There have been many such traditions through the years. Scholars now believe, for example, that Homer composed the Illiad and the Odyssey orally. The Norse composed the sagas orally. The Irish and Welsh and Scots had similar traditions. Here in the desert Southwest, we have the oral traditions of the Navajo and Apache and the pueblo peoples.

An educated person at the time of the Buddha would have learned many poetic forms and structures. These were like music. Just as music has a time signature, a musical notation, a key signature, and so on, these poetic, oral, literary forms had specific structures. The educated person of the Buddha's time would have had knowledge of many different poetic forms. The Pāli Canon is full of poetry. And spontaneously composed poetry is not unheard of even in modern times. We have had battles of the bands, poetry slams, and even rap music. Inventing poetry on the fly is certainly not unknown.

Two of the volumes in the Khuddaka Nikāya are named for their literary form. These are the "Udāna"—which literally means "exclamations"—and the subsequent text, the "Itivuttaka," which means "quotations." The Buddha himself listed nine different literary forms that he used in his discourses.

And this was the way the teachings of the Buddha were composed, memorized, and transmitted. The Buddha's discourses are often criticized for being boring and repetitive. I have heard people make light of the Buddha's many lists. This is all because of a lack of appreciation for the extraordinary language technology of the Buddha's time.

This type of literary structure is called "oral formulaic composition." There is a quite fascinating Wikipedia entry on this phenomenon. In the Buddhist Canon, we see frequent references to incidents where the Buddha gave a discourse. This was followed by those in attendance getting together, restating what the Buddha said, and then committing it to memory. This would then have been taught to others as those disciples traveled around India.

In the West we tend to be skeptical of oral traditions. Curiously, in India, they are equally skeptical of written traditions. They believe that written traditions lend themselves to distortions by the person copying the texts. And I think there are many documented cases of apocryphal passages in the Bible that were added in this way. The most famous of these may be the condemnation of homosexuality.

So the Buddha's discourses were composed using this quite sophisticated language technology. They were committed to memory by people who were trained in memorization and then

transmitted in groups to people who would have likewise memorized them together in a group setting.

Even in modern times, this type of memorization is not unknown. In his book *Jewish Meditation*, Aryeh Kaplan tells a story about being in rabbinical school when he and some friends decided to memorize portions of the Talmud. He says this:

When I was in yeshivah, a few friends and I decided to have a contest to see who could memorize the most pages of the Talmud. For me, it was an interesting experience. The first page took considerable effort and time, perhaps several hours. As I continued, each page became progressively easier. Eventually, after ten pages or so, I found that I could memorize a page after three or four readings. By the time I had gone through some twenty pages, I could memorize a page with a single reading. What had originally been extremely difficult had become relatively easy. My friends reported the same experience.

— [Aryeh Kaplan, *Jewish Meditation*]

These days, of course, we simply look things up on our smartphones. But memorization has a way of committing something to your very being. Buddhist tradition says that when you memorize something, you take it with you into your next life.

Ever since that time, these suttas have been chanted and transmitted orally. The Buddhist scholar Sarah Shaw has written a book about this tradition called, *"The Art of Listening."* She talks about the chanting tradition in Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka. There monasteries commit to chanting the whole of the Pāli Canon. This takes about four months of around the clock chanting. These events are often carried in their entirety by local radio stations. Devout lay people will turn on these stations and listen to them throughout the day.

Sarah Shaw also talks about groups who rehearse like choirs. Then they travel around countries like Thailand performing them. As she says, they become performance art.

So this is the tradition. The Buddha composed discourses that used rhythms and rhymes that were part of India's language technology, a technology that included the aforementioned "oral formulaic composition." These discourses were then committed to memory by the attendees and subsequently taught to others who were typically

monastics. And now they are chanted as part of the fabric of Buddhist culture. And this is part of the tradition of which we are a part. It is a gift from the hundreds and thousands and hundreds of thousands of Buddhists throughout the last 2500 years to us.

So if there is repetition, that is part of the performance art. No one complains when someone sings the refrain to a song for the fourth time. The use of lists is a memory mechanism. If you remember that there are seven of something, it makes remembering them easier. If they are in another language, well, no one ever complained that an opera is in Italian or French or German. None of these things are a problem. They are a solution.

So there are two main points here. The first is that the Buddha's teachings were composed using oral literary forms. They lend themselves to being recited like a soliloquy in a play. And the point is that the discourses are memorized and chanted, sometimes in enormous groups. In this way they are akin to opera or oratorios.

Let me also add what this may mean to you in your practice. Once again, I know this is a bit of a reach. But I would like to encourage you to memorize some chants and use them as a tool. First, when you memorize them, they stay with you. Instead of a song running through your head, it may be the chant instead.

Second, chants are a wonderful way to begin a meditation. They bring you right into this very moment. When you first sit to meditate, your mind may be quite scattered. But chanting can get you right here right now. I have a list of [six chants that I use](#). They are the "homage to the Buddha," "taking refuge," "the precepts," "the Subjects for Frequent Recollection," "the Metta Sutta," and the "Maha Mangala sutta." They take about ten minutes. There is also a [YouTube video of them being chanted](#). These chants are used by Buddhists around the world. These chants have a wonderful meditative effect, and they connect you to generations of Buddhists who are and have been your fellow sisters and brothers in the Dhamma.

Let me finish this section with a story. It has two points to it.

So several months ago I was preparing for this talk. I had some back and forth with our Dharma sister Kelly who lives in Bolivia. She told

me that she has been listening to an audiobook version of the Pāli Canon. I thought that was wonderful, so I bought an audiobook copy of the Majjhima Nikāya.

So the first point I would make about this is that as I listened to Bhikkhu Bodhi's Introduction—which has some wonderful parts to it—I found that I disagreed with about a quarter of what he said. Bhikkhu Bodhi has made wonderful contributions to Western Buddhism. However, as I said, he is an academic and he is a pure Theravadan Buddhist. Theravada Buddhism has its own—shall we say—interpretations and “enhancements” to the Buddha's original teachings, and I am not in agreement with many of them. So that is the first point. Don't be afraid to believe what you are reading in the suttas.

The second point is that I then started listening to the first discourse in the Majjhima Nikāya. I had not read this in a very long time, and it didn't make any sense to me. But nonetheless, I labored through it.

Now for those of you who have read at least some of the Buddha's discourses, you may be familiar with what is a common, happy ending to them, and that is that whoever was in attendance would express pleasure at the Buddha's teaching. You can imagine what a glorious gift it must have felt like being able to see and hear the Buddha in person. This is a common refrain at the end of suttas:

That is what the Blessed One said. The bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words. — [MN 10.47]

This is from Majjhima Nikāya sutta 10.

However, in Majjhima Nikāya 1, my incomprehensible discourse, it ends with this:

That is what the Blessed One said. But those bhikkhus did not delight in the Blessed One's words. — [MN 1.194]

I heard this as I was driving home. It made me smile. I almost burst out laughing. So apparently even 2500 years ago the Buddha's own disciples had the same reaction to this sutta that I did.

The point is that you are not going to understand everything the Buddha taught. You will have one of three reactions to what you read. The first is that you will get something important from it. You

will connect with it. You will learn and gain something from it. And that is wonderful.

The second thing that can happen is that it doesn't make sense to you now, but it will in the future. This can happen at the most unexpected time. It may be years into the future. But one day, you may be meditating or just going through the day, and suddenly something you read or heard years ago will suddenly click with you. This is very gratifying. It is a confirmation that the practice works.

And the third thing that can happen is that a teaching won't mean much to you now or in the future. Again, remember that no one had the complete understanding of the Dhamma that the Buddha did. And this is fine.

It helps to approach the Dhamma with a certain lightness. Be light about the suttas; be light about your own practice. A sense of humor is invaluable in Dhamma practice. You are not going to understand everything. You are going to make mistakes. And this, too, is an invaluable lesson. It helps us be kind and gentle and forgiving in life.

So now let me move into part three of this talk, and this is to give you some examples from the Pāli Canon that I hope will inspire you.

I will start with a sutta I quite love *because* of its repetitions. It is called "If a Bhikkhu Should Wish." It is Majjhima Nikāya sutta 6. I will start by reading the first five of the 20 paragraphs:

Thus have I heard.

On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvattthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park. There he addressed the bhikkhus thus: "Bhikkhus." "Venerable sir," they replied. The Blessed One said this:

2. "Bhikkhus, dwell possessed of virtue, possessed of the Pātimokkha, restrained with the restraint of the Pātimokkha, perfect in conduct and resort, and seeing fear in the slightest fault, train by undertaking the training precepts.

3. "If a bhikkhu should wish: 'May I be dear and agreeable to my companions in the holy life, respected and esteemed by them,' let him fulfil the precepts, be devoted to internal serenity of mind, not neglect meditation, be possessed of insight, and dwell in empty huts.

4. "If a bhikkhu should wish: 'May I be one to obtain robes, almsfood, resting place, and medicinal requisites,' let him fulfil the precepts, be devoted to internal serenity of mind, not neglect meditation, be possessed of insight, and dwell in empty huts.

5. "If a bhikkhu should wish: 'May the services of those whose robes, almsfood, resting place, and medicinal requisites I use bring them great fruit and benefit,' let him fulfil the precepts, be devoted to internal serenity of mind, not neglect meditation, be possessed of insight, and dwell in empty huts.

Now I will skip ahead to paragraph 19. But I think you can see how the Buddha is walking us through the whole of the path, putting the emphasis on the importance of following the precepts, being devoted to serenity of mind, meditating, possessing insight, and dwelling in empty huts:

19. "If a bhikkhu should wish: 'May I, by realising for myself with direct knowledge, here and now enter upon and abide in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints,' let him fulfil the precepts, be devoted to internal serenity of mind, not neglect meditation, be possessed of insight, and dwell in empty huts.

20. "So it was with reference to this that it was said: 'Bhikkhus, dwell possessed of virtue, possessed of the Pātimokkha, restrained with the restraint of the Pātimokkha, perfect in conduct and resort, and seeing fear in the slightest fault, train by undertaking the training precepts.'"

That is what the Blessed One said. The bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words. — [MN 6]

This is so beautiful.

And let me also make a remark about how extremely disappointed I am in Bhikkhu Bodhi and his audiobook narrator for their mistreatment of the repetitions. It seems clear to me that neither one of them is steeped in the beauty and musical nature of this sutta. In the audiobook version, the narrator *skips* the repetitions. If they should be anywhere, it is in an oral version of the discourse!

OK. Enough said.

Next let me share what may be my single favorite passage from the Canon, with the warning that I say this about almost everything in the Canon (except perhaps for Majjhima Nikāya sutta 1). This story

pops up in pieces in various places in the Canon. However, the most complete treatment of this story is in the “Kosambi Sutta,” which is Samyutta Nikaya 12.68.

This story is in three parts. I will summarize the first part in which there is a dispute at a monastery in the city of Kosambi. One monk accuses another monk of a minor transgression in the monastic code. The accused monk denies that he has done anything wrong. This escalates into a major fracture between the monks all of whom align with one monk or the other. The Buddha tries to intervene three times, and each time, he is rebuffed. Therefore, he decides to leave. The Buddha walks away. He is alone.

In the next part of the story, the Buddha traveled to the Eastern Bamboo Park. This was not far from Kosambi. His cousin Anuruddha, who was now an arahant, and his companions Nandiya and Kimbila were staying at the park. As the Buddha approached, a park ranger stopped him. In a touching display of respect, the ranger, who did not know who the Buddha was, wanted to protect the solitude of the bhikkhus. He told the Buddha that he should not enter and disturb them. But Anuruddha saw the Buddha and said:

Friend park keeper, do not keep the Blessed One out. It is our Teacher, the Blessed One, who has come.” Then the venerable Anuruddha went to the venerable Nandiya and the venerable Kimbila and said: “Come out, venerable sirs, come out! Our Teacher, the Blessed One, has come.” — [MN 128.9]

I love the gentle tone that Anuruddha used with the park keeper. He did not reprimand him, and he was not harsh with him. He tenderly called him “friend park keeper.”

You can feel Anuruddha’s excitement for this unexpected visit from the Buddha. India is a big place, and here the Buddha magically appeared. Anuruddha and his companions welcomed him, prepared a seat for him, and then they washed his feet.

The Buddha then asked Anuruddha if they are comfortable and able to get almsfood. Anuruddha assures him that they are well. The Buddha, who is rather obviously thinking about what was happening in Kosambi, next asked Anuruddha if he and his companions are living in harmony:

“I hope, Anuruddha, that you are all living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes.”

“Surely, venerable sir, we are living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes.”

“But, Anuruddha, how do you live thus?”

“Venerable sir, as to that, I think thus: ‘It is a gain for me, it is a great gain for me that I am living with such companions in the holy life.’ I maintain bodily acts of loving-kindness towards these venerable ones both openly and privately; I maintain verbal acts of loving-kindness towards them both openly and privately; I maintain mental acts of loving-kindness towards them both openly and privately. I consider: ‘Why should I not set aside what I wish to do and do what these venerable ones wish to do?’ Then I set aside what I wish to do and do what these venerable ones wish to do. We are different in body, venerable sir, but one in mind.”

The venerable Nandiya and the venerable Kimbila each spoke likewise, adding: “That is how, venerable sir, we are living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes.”

“Good, good, Anuruddha. I hope that you all abide diligent, ardent, and resolute.”

“Surely, venerable sir, we abide diligent, ardent, and resolute.”

“But, Anuruddha, how do you abide thus?”

“Venerable sir, as to that, whichever of us returns first from the village with alms food prepares the seats, sets out the water for drinking and for washing, and puts the refuse bucket in its place. Whichever of us returns last eats any food left over, if he wishes; otherwise he throws it away where there is no greenery or drops it into water where there is no life. He puts away the seats and the water for drinking and for washing. He puts away the refuse bucket after washing it, and he sweeps out the refectory. Whoever notices that the pots of water for drinking, washing, or the latrine are low or empty takes care of them. If they are too heavy for him, he calls someone else by a signal of the hand and they move it by joining hands, but because of this we do not break out into speech. But every five days we sit together all night discussing the Dhamma. That is how we abide diligent, ardent, and resolute.”

— [MN 128.11-14]

So beautiful.

I almost hate to change gears here.

Now let me talk about something you will find if you read enough of the Canon, and that is how the Buddha can surprise us. He was a master wordsmith, and I love it when I run across a passage that startles me and makes me take notice.

I remember the first time I ran across this passage. In it, the Buddha condones killing! To say I was shocked is an understatement. Here is the passage. It is from the Samyutta Nikāya. It is sutta number 1.71 in the first division which features discourses with deities, the devas. Here is the sutta:

At Savatthi. Standing to one side, that devatā addressed the Blessed One in verse:

*“Having slain what does one sleep soundly?
Having slain what does one not sorrow?
What is the one thing, O Gotama,
Whose killing you approve?”*

The Blessed One:

*Having slain anger, one sleeps soundly,
Having slain anger, one does not sorrow,
The killing of anger, O devatā,
With its poisoned root and honeyed tip,
This is the killing the noble ones praise,
For having slain that, one does not sorrow. — [SN 1.71]*

OK. I teased that a bit, but so did he.

That is such a lovely phrase, “anger... with its poisoned root and honeyed tip.”

This next passage is one I ran across about a year ago. Let me preface this by saying that it was inspired by the AIMC online chat. Now as most if not all of you know, there has been a lot of angst expressed over—at the time—the last election and the subsequent administration in Washington. And of course, this is not surprising. There has been a lot of suffering.

Having said that, I also knew that the Buddha never condoned fear or anxiety. So I was curious to know what the Buddha said about fear. I pulled up my eBook copy of the Majjhima Nikāya and did a simple search on the word “fear.” Not surprisingly, nowhere did the

Buddha say that fear is beneficial except in one case. And that is the fear of wrongdoing. He said:

And what, bhikkhus, are the things that make one a recluse, that make one a brahmin? Bhikkhus, you should train thus: 'We will be possessed of shame and fear of wrongdoing.' — [MN 39.3]

The Buddha always has a little something extra for us.

So this will give you, I hope, some of the flavor of the joy, surprise, and wisdom from the Pāli Canon.

Summary:

So now let me summarize. The first point that I made is the importance of making the Buddha *The Teacher*, *The Master*, and that the way to do this is to read the Pāli Canon. And the first four nikāyas are the important ones.

Second, I tried to give you an appreciation for the oral literature of the time as a way of making the Buddha's discourses more accessible. Part of this appreciation is the role of chanting in the Buddhist tradition. Hopefully some day you will be at home and put on some Buddhist chants. Perhaps you can also learn some chants and incorporate them into your practice.

Finally, I read some passages from the Pāli Canon that I hope can whet your appetite for the treasures that are to be found. It is a literature that is a gift beyond measure. You just have to conjure up your inner treasure hunter and go look for the jewels that await you.

And that is tonight's entreatment. Thank you for the gift of your attention.