

ardent Theravadin might wonder whether this emphasis leaves the aspect of achieving Nirvana behind or whether its value has been underplayed. My personal answer for this query is that it is not so. What we need to understand is that Nirvana as understood to be one's personal emancipation without reference to any social context is not what the Buddha really meant. It seems that both Hinayana and Mahayana have subscribed to the same misunderstanding that it is purely personal. An examination of the way of the Buddhist monastic life amply shows that Nirvana has to be achieved within a community in which mutual advice and mutual support (*annan'anna vacana, annam'anna vutthapana*) are the key pillars.

The broader message of the book is that the time has come for Buddhists all over the world to learn from each other and support each other to work for the 'happiness and welfare of the multitude' (*bahujana-hitaya bahujana-suhaya*) as the Buddha's own words exemplify. In this sense, I see Guruge's book as a timely contribution towards growing social consciousness among Buddhists. It challenges Buddhists to come out from their safe cocoons and assess the world anew and to be active. It invites Buddhists all over the world to assess their own situation and role in the global context and respond to its implications. My wish is that this book gets the attention it deserves and be an eye-opener to the Buddhists beyond boundaries.

– Asanga Tilakaratne

This small but highly informative volume, written by the Academic Dean of Hsi Lai University, is a valuable contribution to our understanding of ancient, traditional and contemporary Buddhist beliefs and practices, as well as, those of modern Humanistic Buddhism.

His primary goal is to present and interpret, in brief scope, the teachings, system of spiritual practice, and vision for the

adaptation of traditional Buddhism (including all three of the major traditions, Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana) to the needs and demands of the modern world, according to Ven. Master Hsing Yun, the Founder of the contemporary Buddhist community, Fo Guang Shan.

We might say that his secondary purpose is to present his understanding of Master Hsing Yun's views of Buddhist theory and practice in modern times by demonstrating that his teachings are congruent, in both the spirit and the letter, with the original teachings of The Buddha. Thus, Fo Guang Shan represents a con-temporary embodiment of the Buddha-dharma, with an overriding mission to adapt Buddhism to the modern world.

With this purpose in mind, Dr. Guruge provides a carefully re-searched and meticulously documented account of the many parallels between the teachings of Gautama, the Buddha and Ven. Master Hsing Yun. He finds these commonalities in their general worldview, spiritual teachings, the immediate and ultimate goals of Buddhist practice, the mission of Buddhism to the world and the most effective means of carrying forward that mission on a world-wide basis.

The entire book is based upon Master Hsing Yun's address before the inaugural session of the First International Conference on Humanistic Buddhism, held at Hsi University in 1999.

Master Hsing Yun's vision of the mission of Buddhism in the modern world might be exemplified in a brief selection from his address:

Humanistic Buddhism emphasizes our treatment of other people above everything else. No one can ever expect to come into full awareness of the Bodhi mind if they do not know how to treat other people with compassion, respect and unflinching kindness. Meditation and chanting are not means to escape this earth. The concentration, wisdom, peace and joy that we find in

meditation are skills that should be applied in this world. We should use them whenever we deal with others.” (Guruge 10)

By way of general summary, this book covers a wide range of topics found in the writings of Master Hsing Yun, that elaborately and beautifully exemplify the core vision embedded in this quotation. The topics covered include the following: the universality of the Buddha’s teachings, his principles for the spreading of the Dharma, the distinctly humanistic orientation of the Buddha’s teachings, the coalescence of Wisdom and Compassion throughout the Buddhist tradition, The Buddha as Teacher and Role Model, the challenges of Buddhism in adapting to a changing world, the role of Humanistic Buddhism for the promotion of social well-being for all peoples everywhere, and, finally, a summary and interpretation of Master Hsing Yun’s formulation of the central principles of Humanistic Buddhism and their implementation in the modern world.

Dr. Guruge initiates his study of Fo Guang Shan with the story of Master Hsing Yun’s encounter with an older “enthusiast who was . . . convinced of Patriarch Huineng’s vision of Buddhism as an integral part of human life in this very world.” (Guruge 2)

In the opening chapter, the author discusses the universal scope and applicability of the Buddha’s life and teachings and his vision of the “educational” mission of the Sangha.

Chapter 2 covers the pragmatic teaching methods of the Buddha, the Sangha as understood to be a community of “educators,” its continual adaptability to an ever-changing historical situation, the revival of the Sangha in the twentieth-century and the restoration of the order of the nuns, and the role of scholars and scholarly research in the promotion of the Dharma.

In Chapter 3, the author recapitulates the story of the Buddha’s life, his experience

of enlightenment and his work in propagating the Dharma. He emphasizes the uniquely humanistic nature of those teachings and the Buddha’s understanding of the goal of Dharma-cultivation to be “the perfection of the human personality.”

Next, Dr. Guruge counters the stereotyped view of Buddhism as basically passive and world-denying in its general orientation, by citing King Asoka and Master Hsing Yun to the effect that the Buddha-dharma can be most faithfully practiced by living one’s own life out of an ethic of compassion and caring-for others and by the commitment of one’s own actions to the fostering of universal social and spiritual well-being. This ethic of compassion is succinctly epitomized in a brief statement of Master Hsing Yun’s:

Remember, no one is going to achieve liberation from the cycle of birth and death if he has not figured out how to live as a human being in the human realm. (Guruge 61)

Then, there follows a brief discussion of the Buddha’s life and teachings as an archetypal model of “compassionate living,” and the Grand Master’s definition of “the doctrinal unity of all traditions of Buddhism,” as a foundation for the establishment of Humanistic Buddhism. In this chapter, Dr. Guruge briefly recounts his personal rediscovery of his Buddhist heritage and the process of making it his own life-philosophy.

Chapter 6 is, for this reviewer, the most illuminating chapter in the book. In this chapter, the author explores “Humanistic Buddhism in a Changing World,” and finds that it offers highly beneficial insights into all major aspects of modern life: the Buddhist “systems approach” to understanding the world and, the Buddha’s views of the social equality of all human beings, the ideally democratic nature of all forms of government, the place of money, success, and wealth in the life of the Buddhist, the Buddhist view of the natural world and the importance of ecological “care-taking,” and the natural and positive

adaptability of Buddhism to the principles of Modern Science.

In Chapter 7, the author discusses the "modern temper" (a western literary critic's phrase) of Buddhism, with its emphasis on the need to "see things as they really are," the crucial role of critical thinking in modern times, and the "timelessness" of the teachings of Buddhism that is a natural by-product of its pervasive flexibility.

In Chapter 8, Dr. Guruge discusses the Path of the Arahant and the Path of the Bodhisattva, with ample citations of ancient Buddhist texts and modern writings, with a view toward sketching out the strategy for a "universal Buddhism for social well-being."

This excellent interpretative summary of Ven. Master's teaching culminates in a series of hermeneutical statements by the author concerning the nature and mission of Humanistic Buddhism: "to bring Buddhism, literally and metaphorically, from the mountains to the city and the village," to serve humanity as a whole, to pro-mote a form of Buddhism that is socially-engaged at all levels of social life, to explore ways of living life in a purposeful and well-directed manner, to benefit all peoples through education and social services, to rise above all parochial and sectarian considerations, and thereby, to bring to realization the goal(s) of Buddhism in this very life. (Or, as Master Hsing Yun has states the matter in a number of places in his writings, "to create a Pure Land in this very world.")

In conclusion, this small but highly informative and insightful book can serve well the needs of those people who wish to inform them-selves about and come to a clear understanding of the relevance of Humanistic Buddhism to the modern world and how that understanding of Buddhist beliefs and practices is organically expressive of the basic teachings of the Buddha, himself.

– J. Bruce Long

Serendipity of Andrew George

By Ananda W.P. Guruge

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Available from www.1stbooks.com

Ananda Guruge's *Free at Last in Paradise* was an unusual novel. It traced the history of the one hundred years of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), leading up to independence. The focus was on the national and Buddhist revival and the related movement for regaining independence. This was skillfully interwoven with a personal story, too, of a boy: his growing up, his entering the order of monks, his successful life as a layman for a time, and his eventual return to monkhood, achieving fame as a great scholar. In this human story, love and other human emotions featured. It was a remarkable book by any standards: original, multi-layered, informative and touching.

The author has now produced a sequel to this book: *Serendipity of Andrew George*. This is an equally remarkable book; it is equally readable - indeed 'unputdownable,' equally satisfying, and equally intriguing. It also, like its predecessor, contains a wealth of information woven into the novel. This time the information is about the religious, cultural, historical and geographical aspects of the island of Sri Lanka, provided in a highly readable way as part of the story. One almost gets the impression that this is an encyclopedia on Sri Lanka, parading as a novel! I mean this not as a criticism, but as a compliment.

The setting is in the 1960s, a vibrant and exciting decade for the Island. The title is based on a pun. *Serendip* was the name by which the country was known to some foreign writers of times past. The word serendipity was derived from it, meaning an incidental discovery or an apparent aptitude for making fortunate discoveries accidentally. And the novel's theme is Andrew George's serendipity, literally and