

Teacher and student

Staring at the blank screen before writing can be nice, looking at the emptiness. Closing the document can be a relief. In the middle there can be a lot of uncertainty. Communication is not always easy. In Buddhist circles, however, I am not expected to take all the responsibility and this can make all the difference.

In Buddhism some of this responsibility instead falls on the listener; the relationship between teacher and student is not a one-way relationship. It is the duty of the teacher to present the teaching to the best of his ability, and the duty of the student to tell the teacher if they think his or her teaching is straying from the Dhamma; it is then the duty of the teacher to listen to the feedback. It is further the duty of the student to find another teacher if things are not working out. This can demand a lot of honesty, and an attitude of being prepared to move on and try to find this new teacher on behalf of the student. We might find that we have to put the Dhamma before attachments to individuals and places.

For the teacher the challenge is often to stay with the truth rather than trying just to please the student, especially if his livelihood depends on it. In this respect what protects the Dhamma is for faithful Buddhists to support any monk or nun who is keeping the discipline, with his or her basic needs, regardless of their teaching. This generosity is based on the faith that when the monks and nuns are training the way they do, they are developing an understanding of the inner life that is relevant to all. This can be hard to fathom.

“What relevance does all this have to life in the office?” I hear them say.

“Listen with an open mind and decide for yourselves,” is the reply. People from all walks of life have been doing so for two and half thousand years and found sufficient value to support Monastics in return. Must be something in it, don't you think? After all, has human nature changed so much?

I offer this for your reflection.

Ajahn Kalyāno

<http://www.openthesky.co.uk>