

## **What is Given is not Lost**

by Piya Tan

Last week I upgraded my computer because the old one has significantly slowed down and crashed more often. Such times are “intermediate states” for me: I lose some data but also found better ways of working (like having more space for my files, and a faster system).

In fact, what motivated me to write this reflection is the fact that I have lost my folder containing all my past reflections and notes for new ones. Fortunately, Ratna has uploaded the completed reflections onto the Dharmafarer website. This is the first example of how we do not lose what we share with others. They are always available online.

However, the numerous notes I made for future reflections are still lost. They were kept on an external hard-drive which crashed or maybe I configured it wrongly. For some strange reason, I have not put the reflections’ main file in my fixed disc, and back it up onto the external disc. Conveniently, we tend to blame such carelessness to Mara.

There was at least once when in a serious computer breakdown I actually lost all the annotated Sutta translations I had done! Imagine, your life’s work suddenly lost in a few minutes. Fortunately, we had uploaded all the completed files onto the Dharmafarer website, and burned them on CD and given them away.

So we downloaded what we had uploaded, and salvaged the rest from CDs we borrowed from those we have given them. But a few new and unpublished translations were lost. Only their corrupted files remained.

But looking carefully at the forest of letters and symbols in a corrupted file, what appeared to me to be machine language, I notice a few familiar words, and then sentences. They were those I had written! In fact, I noticed there was a pattern in the corruption. So, using recurring lines of gibberish, I started to globally delete them.

More and more of the sentences I had written and the Sutta passages I have translated began to reappear, like some ancient lost message beginning to reappear before my eyes! It is hard to describe the joy that accompanied this experience.

By the time I have removed all the gibberish, I managed to get back a healthy proportion of the lost file. All I needed to do then was to fill in the missing portions. In fact, I realized in the end I have updated a new and revised edition of the Sutta translation. It was a better one than the previous one I had done.

The lesson here is: never despair in the worst of losses. Look deep into it to see what you can learn, and you will surprise yourself if you are positive and have faith in the Dharma.

My biggest worldly loss was perhaps my huge house-full of library books: it was “lost” after I resigned from monkhood. Over more than two decades I had accumulated many useful, rare, expensive and precious books, encyclopaedias, Tripitaka sets, and so on. And also signed book

gifts from famous monks and writers. Certain parties had hoped that this would stop me from writing “subversive” Buddhist exposes and critiques.

Fortunately, I had a small library which was not lost because it was always with me, as it were, that is, a bare collection of the Pali Canon and most of my personal papers. These precious few documents are still with me today, and I still use them in my work.

But the most wonderful thing I discovered is that whatever I have lost, such as the Tipitaka sets, are now easily and freely available online! And they take up very much less space. If I had all my old library, I would need to put into a whole 4-room flat in Singapore!

Through my losses, I have learned a very valuable Dharma lesson. Pain arises proportional to the attachment. Through losses we know what we really need and should value, and should let go of the rest. And the most wonderful lesson to learn is that when we freely give, the giving is never lost.

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