

Enlightening the Load...

So the Buddha's Enlightenment Day is on January 26, 2007. Talking about the Buddha's enlightenment is not an easy matter because we are told that without experience it for ourselves we cannot judge. The result is that many schools of Buddhism have simply dismissed the possibility by saying that it might be only possible in a far off lifetime. Korean Buddhism is divided between those that say it is possible now and those that say it is far off, between those that say practice before only and those that say practice before and after. Elsewhere I am told that I am a Buddha and already enlightened but I do not know it. Some authors even suggest pretending that you are already enlightened so you experience the feeling!

So what can I do with all this, me, the simple Buddhist? Let us, just for a moment, bring all these ideas down to our level. What, as a Buddhist, do I really want in life?

For me the attraction of Buddhism and the one dimension that has held my attention all these years is the idea of freedom. However, like most people I also want to be happy. The Buddha clearly says, "I teach the overcoming of suffering" which means that I will become happy and free.

Happiness we all know. It is the deep-seated peace of contentment coupled with gratitude and compassion (There are millions — as many as there are people — of definitions of happiness, so I won't attempt that here. These are the main qualities that I can identify).

What about freedom? Freedom from what? The Buddhist texts tell me that with enlightenment, true understanding, the Nahan puts down his load. He is finally able to take off his heavy back-pack and put it on the ground. He feels light, buoyant and open to everyone and everything. So what was in that huge sack? First of all there are fears — for the future, for loved ones, for well-being — then there are the attachments, the things to be concerned about — the future, loved ones, well-being — and then there the desires, the wishes, the hopes. Wow, what a huge bag!

And so today I am going to take the first step forward: I am going to identify something that I can take out of my huge bag. The bag may only be a few grams lighter but it will be at least one step! **L**