

An Exploration of the Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta: Content and Context

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Abstract

The *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* (Sn 258-269) is an important Buddhist text well-known and oft-used in Asia, but it is much less familiar to Western Buddhists. Through documents-based research of primary and secondary sources in English, Pāli, and Chinese, as well as interviews with senior Western *Dhamma* teachers, this dissertation aims to provide greater understanding of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* (MMS) by addressing the content and contexts of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta*, exploring its authenticity, historical and current uses, and assessing its potential for greater integration into Western Buddhist practice.

Placement of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* and its closely-related texts in the Pāli Canon is outlined, and the authenticity of the MMS as an early text is analysed. Historical context of the *sutta* (*sūtra*) is presented, focusing on transmission and its use in edification and devotional practice in Southern Buddhism. The existence and significance of related Tibetan and Chinese texts are reviewed.

Discussion of hermeneutics focuses on four elements of 'improvisational hermeneutics': author and author's intention, text, interpreter, and interpretive community (Benson, 2006: 200-204). These elements are considered in the context of an 'improvisational Buddhist hermeneutic' and applied to the MMS, using early Buddhist texts to identify key themes in the Buddha's early teaching, addressing challenges in translating the MMS into English, reviewing previous MMS interpretations, and broadly overviewing how Buddhist interpretive communities currently use the *sutta*.

Information based on interviews with seven senior *Dhamma* teachers is presented, including: current uses and key aspects of the *sutta*, obstacles and challenges to its use, and opportunities. Opportunities are related to Benson's improvisational hermeneutics and include: improving translations, fostering fuller understanding of the role of ethics, reframing 'simple' as worthwhile, and encouraging openness and diligence. The strength of the MMS as a key teaching is affirmed by the respondents' average rating of the MMS as 9.36 of 10.00 for potential usefulness in teaching. This study concludes that the MMS is a highly useful and currently under-utilised text in terms of Western Buddhist practice.

List of abbreviations used

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
BSk	Buddhist Sanskrit
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
EBT	Early Buddhist Text
Ja	<i>Jātaka</i>
Khp	<i>Khuddaka-pāṭha</i>
MMS	<i>Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta</i>
PED	Pāli-English Dictionary
PTS	Pali Text Society
Sk	Sanskrit
SN	<i>Saṃyutta-nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i>
Ud	<i>Udāna</i>

Chapter 1: Introduction

Although the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* (*Sūtra*) is well-known and oft-used in Asia, it is much less familiar to Buddhists in the West. And yet, as Charles Hallisey of the Harvard Divinity School remarked, 'I think it is one of the most important texts that we have' (dhamma videos, 2018). Prebist (1993: 56) characterised it as 'among the most important Theravāda texts' on ethics. In order to provide greater understanding of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* (MMS), this dissertation investigates the text and its reliability, its historical and current contexts and uses, as well as obstacles to and opportunities for greater integration into contemporary Western Buddhist practice.

Philological aspects include: authenticating the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* (Sn 258-269) as an early text (Chapter 3), reviewing historical contexts and transmissions (Chapters 4 and 5), and considering various hermeneutics, or interpretations, of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* (MMS) (Chapter 6). These chapters lay the groundwork for exploring, through findings from interviews with a sampling of Western *Dhamma* teachers, modern uses and under-utilisation of the MMS in the West, and factors related to the potentially greater use by Western Buddhist practitioners (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 provides both summary and discussion.

'Early' in this study refers to within the lifetime of the Buddha. One can debate definitions of 'Early Buddhist Texts' (EBTs) or 'Early Buddhism', but the intent here is simply to explore whether or not the MMS originated from within the Buddha's lifetime.

Verses of the MMS and other texts are identified as 'V1.', 'V2.' and so on. Verse numbers obviously did not occur in original texts and are provided for ease of reference.

Locations in references to sound recordings are given in the format '7:00-7:30', indicating the thirty seconds from the start of minute seven.

Discussion excludes commentaries such as the *Maṅgalatthadīpanī*.

Where Sanskrit equivalents vary from Pāli words, they are provided (if known) in the first instance of appearance and not repeated thereafter, however Pāli words occurring only (in this dissertation) in the MMS text remain untranslated. Sanskrit words used by interviewees are reproduced faithfully. Buddhist Sanskrit is provided as notated in the Pāli-English Dictionary (PED). Translation of Chinese pinyin is given in the first instance, and simplified or traditional character use follows original sources.

Chapter 2: Methods

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach, qualitative with a small quantitative component. It combined philological inquiry in Chapters 3-6 with a grounded-theory approach taken in Chapter 7. Research relied on primary and secondary sources including: books, journals, periodicals, interviews, personal communications (email), and web-based sources including SuttaCentral.net, AccesstoInsight.org, BuddhisteLibrary.org, Tripitaka.cbeta.org, NtiReader.org, TamilCube.com and SanskritDictionary.com. Documents were accessed in English, French, Pāli, and Chinese.

Philological exploration of authentication relied on review of characteristics typical of Early Buddhist Texts as presented by four scholars. The MMS was then assessed using those characteristics.

Initially, a documents-based approach was planned for investigating contemporary devotional and pedagogical uses of the MMS. Early in the research process, it became clear that suitable material was limited, and speaking directly with key individuals provided a practical method of gathering further information.

Limitations of resources necessitated interviewing only a handful of people. One decision, to focus on Western teachers of primarily Western students, was taken because a key inquiry of this research is the limited use of the MMS in the West. Another decision was to create diversity in the sample pool. This meant engaging monastic and lay teachers from different communities and ensuring gender diversity.

A list of fourteen experienced Western *Dhamma* (*Dharma*) teachers was compiled and invitations emailed. Ten were individuals the researcher had some prior contact with, and four were approaches with no prior contact. Six agreed interviews, two recommended others who agreed interviews, two declined because they do not use the MMS, and four did not reply. One interviewee was ultimately unable to participate. Invitation and consent letters (Appendix A) were sent, signed, and returned. Interviewees were given the opportunity to remain anonymous. Seven interviews were conducted, six by video call and one by email, with three female and four male teachers, representing seven communities.

A semi-structured, 10-question interview was used (Appendix B), consisting of open and closed qualitative questions and one quantitative question. One Buddhist academic and one experienced lay practitioner reviewed the interview questions. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and sent to interviewees, along with a draft findings chapter, to check for accuracy. Corrections and clarifications were received and incorporated from six interviewees. Transcripts were coded using MAXQDA (VERBI, 2018) software and assessed using a grounded-theory approach.

As interviews generated more data than could be meaningfully incorporated into this study, analysis focused on questions pertaining to how the MMS is being used in the West, obstacles, challenges, and opportunities regarding its usage, and important reflections or insights. Appendix C contains interview transcriptions.

The small number of interviewees is recognised as a limitation of this study.

This chapter outlines the placement of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* (MMS) in the Pāli Canon (PTS edition) and identifies related texts. To address the philological question of the reliability of the text, discussion then turns to the authenticity of the MMS as an early Buddhist text (EBT).

3.1 Placement in the Pāli Canon

In the Theravādan Pāli Canon, there exist four MMS-related texts, all found within the *Khuddaka-nikāya* of the *Sutta Piṭaka*. Figure 1 indicates the placement of these four. The two *sutta* versions are identical apart from minor variations in title. The *Maṅgala Sutta* (Khp 5) occurs in the first book of the *Khuddaka-pāṭha*. The second version, the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* (Sn 258-269), is located in the second chapter (*Cūḷa-vagga*, or Minor Chapter) of the *Sutta-nipāta*'s fifth book.

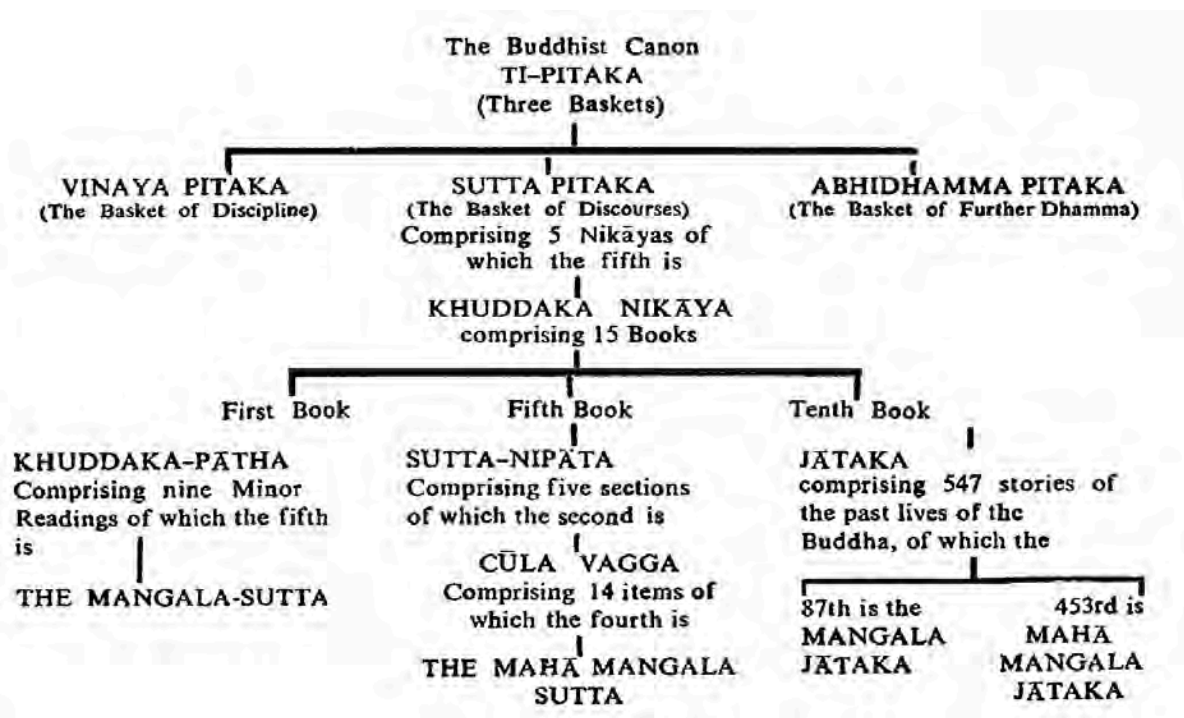


Figure 1. Placement of the MMS and related texts in the *Sutta Piṭaka* (Soni, 2018: 5)

Found in the *Khuddhaka-nikāya*'s tenth book are the two *Jātaka* versions: the *Maṅgala Jātaka* (*Jātaka* 87, Ja.I.374) and the *Mahā-Maṅgala Jātaka* (*Jātaka* 453, Ja.IV.75) (Soni, 2018: 4). The content of these two varies substantially from the language of the *suttas* of the same names, yet there are obvious links.

The *Maṅgala Jātaka* describes the Buddha being approached by a Brahmin anticipating ill-luck because of a cloth having been gnawed by a rat, which he considered as inauspicious, or

amaṅgala (Soni, 2018: 5). The word ‘*amaṅgala*’ is a negated form of ‘*maṅgala*’, which means a lucky object, omen, or sign of some sort. Often translated as ‘blessing’, it has no direct English equivalent. Modern-day examples might include lucky horseshoes or four-leaf clovers (Bodhi, 2005a: 9:30-10:45). ‘*Amaṅgala*’ is therefore something deemed unlucky. In *Jātaka* 87, the Brahmin was ‘weaned out of his superstition’ regarding what is *amaṅgala* (Soni, 2018: 5).

Jātaka 453 describes humans and the god Sakka considering omens, or *maṅgalas*, culminating in Sakka’s approaching the Buddha. This corresponds closely to the MMS prose introduction in which a *deva* goes to the Buddha with the same question. *Jātaka* 453 details the Buddha’s response to Sakka, how he ‘in twelve stanzas told him the eight-and-thirty great omens’ (Rouse, 1901: 48). This aligns exactly with the number of stanzas and *maṅgalas* described in both *sutta* versions. While the storyline of *Jātaka* 453 is quite different to that of the *sutta*, it nonetheless similarly focuses on people creating their own good fortune through wholesome actions.

3.2 An Early Buddhist Text?

Identifying Early Buddhist Texts is challenging, as the Pāli Canon was established after hundreds of years of oral transmission and has been subject to numerous additions and redactions. Still, it is possible to assess a text as early with a reasonable level of confidence. Sujato and Brahmali (2015: 7) explained the situation and process well:

...it is overly skeptical and unscientific to conclude from the lack of such direct evidence that we cannot say anything, that we cannot reach firm conclusions. Science works from indirect and inferred evidence, and the preponderance of such indirect evidence points to the authenticity of the EBTs.

‘Indirect and inferred evidence’ refers to a variety of characteristics, both internal and external to the text itself. One can examine those characteristics, then assess the preponderance of evidence regarding dating a particular text.

One might assume that the MMS is early because it occurs in the *Sutta-nipāta*, which of course contains two collections widely recognised to be of the oldest stratum of Buddhist teachings: the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* (Sn 766-975) and the *Pārāyana-vagga* (Sn 1032-1154), the ‘Chapter of Octads’ and the ‘Chapter on the Way to the Beyond’, respectively. Yet extrapolating that the MMS, or any other individual text, is of old provenance simply due to its placement within the *Sutta-nipāta* has no firm basis, as the *Sutta-nipāta* contains ‘older and younger material side by side’ (Jayawickrama, 1976: 75).

A more reliable approach is to examine elements commonly understood to indicate an early Buddhist text (EBT), and then to analyse the *sutta* in terms of those elements. What follows is a discussion of four such sets of characteristics, limited to those directly relevant to the MMS,

developed by Fronsdal (2016), Jayawickrama (1976), Sujato and Brahmali (2015), and Warder (2016). Table 1 provides a summary of these, notation as to their indication of early or later texts, and indication of their presence in the MMS. These characteristics can broadly be divided into three groups: linguistic or structural characteristics include poetic metre, composition type, vocabulary and grammar, and Vedic influence; stylist or doctrinal elements include the overall style, doctrinal complexity, use of fractal structures, and social conditions; other factors include cross-referencing within the Pāli Canon and mention of the supernatural.

The first of the linguistic characteristics considered here is metre. The use of metre in dating EBTs has long been studied and is usually discussed with a caveat about using it in isolation from other confirmatory factors. Warder (2016: 3) argued that metres of ‘Pāli texts offer the possibility of approximate dating’. Yet he also noted that ‘Geiger (1916) and others long ago pointed out the archaisms in the Canon... seem to betray rather later texts deliberately made to look old’ (Warder, 2016: 10). While this comment did not specifically point to metre, it is inclusive of metre. Jayawickrama (1976: 78) similarly cautioned that metre is not a sole ‘criterion for fixing relative dates’, while recognising that it ‘forms a very useful source of confirmatory evidence’.

The metre of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* suggests an early stratum. Warder (2016: 172) identified the metre as *vatta* (*vaktra*), which is structurally ‘close to the *anuṣṭubh* of the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Upaniṣhads*’. This places the *vatta* metre as quite early. However, there are distinguishable variations in the *vatta*. Warder (2016: 172) noted that the *vatta* of the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* and the *Pārāyana-vagga* is older than that of other texts including the *Jātakas* and *Dhammapada*. Similarly, Anandajoti (2013: 19) differentiated between ‘early *Siloka*’ and ‘late *Siloka*’, *siloka* (*śloka*) being another term for *vatta*. For ‘early *Siloka*’, Anandajoti (2013: 17-19) determined the line type called ‘*pathyā*’ accounts for ‘about 60% or more of the prior lines’, and his scansion of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* (Appendix E) found thirteen of eighteen lines, or 81%, to be *pathyā* and thus clearly ‘early *Siloka*’.

As to composition, one expects to encounter verses in very early texts. Review of the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* and the *Pārāyana-vagga* of the *Sutta-nipāta* reveal no prose components whatsoever; these *vaggas* are entirely in verse.¹ Jayawickrama (1976: 87) argued that *suttas* such as the MMS consist of original ballads (in verse) with prose passages that clothe the verse ‘in the standard Canonical garb’, a standardisation taking place ‘long after the composition of the ballads themselves’. Viewed through this lens, one can clearly see two elements to the MMS: the early-origin core verses in the *vatta* metre, and the later-origin frame story, consisting of the prose introduction and perhaps the first verse, which connects the frame story to with the subsequent verses.

¹ The *Pārāyana-vagga*’s introductory verses have been identified as a later addition (Pande, 2015: 59; Warder, 2016: 1999).

Table 1. Characteristics relating to dating Early Buddhist Texts and their presence in the MMS¹

	Fronsdal	Jayawickrama	Sujato and Brahmalī	Warder	Presence in the MMS
Linguistic or structural					
Use of ancient poetic metres	early	confirmatory	early	early	present
Composition type: entirely in verse		early			main body in verse
Composition type: mixed prose and verse		later			present
Composition type: frame story		later addition		later	has frame story
Use of ancient vocabulary and grammar	early	early	early	early	absent
Vedic influence: Brahmanical terms given new meaning		early	early		present
Stylistic or doctrinal					
Style: simple, direct			early	early	present
Doctrinal: not doctrinal; direct; brief; expresses basic, fundamental concepts		early	early		present
Doctrinal: elaborates on previously established fundamental concepts		later	later		absent
Fractal structure use			early		
Social conditions: lack of reference to settled monastic life	early				present
Additional					
Mentioned in other Buddhist scriptures	early	early	early		Jātaka 87 and 453
Supernatural events			later		Present in frame story and first verse

Vocabulary and grammar are also cited as strong evidence of early material. Potentially indicative of early provenance are words or word forms of an archaic nature, or features such as ‘Magadhisms’, distinctive linguistic features that could ‘be regarded as the remnants of the language used by the Buddha when preaching in Magadha’ (Norman, 2008: 51). Whether any of these occur in *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* is a question for further inquiry by those with the requisite philological skills. What is clear is that the word ‘maṅgala’ itself is an ancient word. It occurs in the

¹ Fronsdal (2016: 4-5), Jayawickrama (1976: 76-90), Sujato and Brahmalī (2015: 66-98), Warder (2016)(1967).

Ṛgveda, which pre-dates the Buddha. Minkowski (2008: 22) described '*maṅgala*' as an 'odd' word with several interpretations, the older notion of *maṅgala* being 'that of an inherently auspicious word or sign'. As EBTs often share imagery and metaphors with Vedic literature (Sujato and Brahmali, 2015:67), the choice of '*maṅgala*' as the central recurring word in the MMS seems therefore significant, lending weight to viewing the *sutta* as early.

Stylistically, the EBTs tend to be terse and direct. Warder (2016: 226) explained that the Canon 'grew from a collection of simple direct poems... characterized by a forceful, rather abrupt diction'. Likewise, Sujato and Brahmali (2015: 73) described EBTs as 'straight to the point and realistic'.

Doctrine likewise tends towards brevity and density, evident in the succinct and straightforward teachings of the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* and *Pārāyana-vagga*. Sujato and Brahmali discussed how early teachings were elaborated upon over time, using the example of the *satipaṭṭhāna* formula. Originally quite terse, this straightforward teaching was added to over time, using increasingly elaborate and grammatically-complicated language (Sujato and Brahmali, 2015: 70-71). A similar understanding is reflected in Jayawickrama's statement that 'no well-defined *developments* as such are to be noticed in the older ballads... but a gradual change can be marked in the later ones' (1976: 79).

Additionally, Fronsdal's (2016: 5) description of the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* pointed to simplicity in style evidenced, for example, by an absence of systemised or numbered teachings. A detailed review of the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* confirms Fronsdal's observation. This stands in contrast to Gethin's (1996: 156) assertion that 'early Buddhist literature contains... a great number of lists'. This difference could be explained by assuming Gethin considered somewhat later, albeit still relatively early, material. Fronsdal's assessment is strengthened by Tan's (2010: 4) characterisation of early *suttas* being 'usually unstructured but point[ing] directly to the awakening truths'.

Sujato and Brahmali (2015: 99) also described 'fractal structures' in EBTs, which are 'compressible' patterns that allow for learning 'the essence of the *Dhamma* in a few words'. This is certainly characteristic of the MMS, with an excellent example being the verse eleven line, 'One whose mind does not shake when touched by worldly conditions' (see section 6.3).

Reflections of social conditions can also be helpful in identifying EBTs. The dominant of Brahmanical culture, for example, is reflected in the Buddha's re-conceptualising popular Brahmanical terms. A second example is that, at the time of the earliest teachings, the Buddha was itinerant and had not yet formed monasteries, thus there is no reference to settled monastic life (Fronsdal, 2016: 5). Early texts refer not to monastic Buddhism but to the monk (*bhikkhu*, Sk: *bhikṣu*), renunciant (*samaṇa*, Sk: *saṃyamin*, BSk: *śramaṇa*) or sage (*muni*) (Jayawickrama, 1976: 80). In the MMS, exhortations for people to hear or discuss *dhamma* refer to doing so with ascetics, or *samaṇa*, with no mention of monasteries.

One aspect of the MMS indicating it is *not* of the earliest stratum of Buddhist teachings is that review of the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* and the *Pārāyana-vagga* reveals that teachings were directed to *bhikkhus* or *samaṇas*. Yet the language of the MMS is clearly inclusive of laypeople. References to spouse (wife), children, and intoxicating drink are directly applicable to the laypeople, not monastics. This suggests composition in middle to latter part of the Buddha's long period of teaching.

External evidence in the form of cross-references existing elsewhere in the Pāli Canon or early commentaries is characteristic of EBTs. The *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* is specifically mentioned by name several times elsewhere in the Canon, which Fronsdal (2008: 5) identified as perhaps the single most compelling piece of evidence for understanding the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* as early. Jayawickrama (1976: 81) similarly emphasised the significance of later *suttas* referencing and quoting from earlier *suttas*. Norman (1983: 63) added that the *Niddesa*, one of the oldest commentaries, references both the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* and the *Pārāyana-vagga*, lending credence to 'the great age of the two *vaggas*'. The MMS does not enjoy similar robust cross-referencing, limited to the two related *Jātakas* and oral building blocks the MMS shares with other *suttas* (see section 4.1).

MMS does, however, clearly reflect characteristics presented in this section, being comprehensive yet succinct, elegant yet not elaborate, and outlining a practical, direct path of practice without reference to even the barest of doctrinal frames such as *sīla-samādhi-pañña* (*sīla-samādhi-prajñā*) (ethical conduct-concentration-wisdom) or *kamma-vipāka* (*karman-vipāka*) (action-result). One can certainly superimpose those frames on the MMS, yet the teaching itself focuses on what is to be done rather than any philosophical frameworks within which those actions sit.

3.3 Preponderance of evidence

The preponderance of evidence suggests that the MMS is of early origin but not of the earliest stratum. Evidence indicating the MMS is early includes:

- the main body being in verse;
- use of the *vatta* metre, and an early version of that metre;
- infusion of a Brahmanical term from the *Ṛigveda* with a new meaning;
- simple, direct teaching and language;
- fractal structure use;
- no reference to settled, monastic Buddhism;
- cross-references in two *Jātakas*.

Evidence that indicates the MMS is not of the earliest stratum includes:

- inclusion of a prose frame story;
- the somewhat refined quality of most verses sharing a common ending, a style

not found in the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* or *Pārāyana-vagga*;

- the earliest teachings being directed to ascetics, whereas the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* is directly more broadly.

This conclusion is supported by the assessment of two contemporary teachers.

Anandajoti Bhikkhu (2018) identified the MMS as ‘early to mid, but certainly within Buddha's lifetime’. Tan’s assessment was that the MMS was taught by the Buddha during roughly the latter 25-35 years of his teaching, in the ‘late 1st period or during the 2nd period of the Ministry’ (Tan, 2012: 3; 2018).

Chapter 4: The Historical Context

This chapter addresses a few key aspects of the historical context of the MMS within Southern Buddhism. Discussion focuses first on philological considerations of reliability of early oral transmission and then turns to historical uses of the MMS for edification and religious ceremonies.

4.1 Early oral transmission and the MMS

Early Buddhist material was transmitted orally for several hundred years before being written down. As the reliability of orally-transmitted material is often questioned, discussed here are two important factors contributing to successful early oral transmission of texts such as the MMS: the capacity of monastics to memorise vast quantities of material utilising mnemonic devices, and the ways in which material was organised and recited.

That the baseline memorisation capacity of monastics was extremely high was noted by Bhikkhu Bodhi (2017: 20:40-21:05), who commented that in nonliterate cultures, ‘people’s ability to memorise things is much sharper than our own’ and that ‘in ancient India, there were those who trained themselves in memorising texts’. These strong memorisation abilities were supported by the use of mnemonics. Cousins (2005: 96) identified ‘widespread use of mnemonic formulae... an aid to performance and to maintain the continuity of form’.

Discussed here are mnemonic structures found in the MMS, including structure, repetition, synonyms, and waxing syllables. Common mnemonic devices not occurring in the MMS are not discussed.

The very structure of the MMS verses is one mnemonic. Written entirely in the *vatta* metre, the predictability of the rhythm is an aid to memory. Further aiding memory is repetition. This occurs in the refrain, ‘*etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ*’, which concludes each verse of the Buddha’s teaching. Further repetition occurs with the words ‘*kālena*’ in the phrases ‘*kālena dhammasavanaṃ*’ and ‘*kālena dhammasākacchā*’. While minor, these nonetheless aid memorisation. Repetition also occurs in naturally-related words pairs such as ‘*āratī*’ with ‘*viratī*’ (distaste and abstention) or ‘*gāravo*’ with ‘*nivāto*’ (respect and humility). Though not direct synonyms, these logical pairs serve a similar mnemonic function. The MMS also contains strings of words following the principle of ‘waxing syllables’, in which initial words are followed by words of the same or greater number of syllables (Anālayo, 2011: 15-16; Sujato and Brahmali, 2015: 51). Two clear examples emerge from MMS verses when separating the conjunction ‘*ca*’ (‘and’):

V1. *Bahu deva manussa ca mangalani acintayum...*

V8. *Gāravo ca nivāto ca, santuṭṭhi ca kataññutā...*

Another ‘waxing syllable’ occurrence becomes evident when ‘ca’ is written separately:

V5. *Bāhu saccañ ca sippañ ca, vinayo ca susikkhito...*

This constellation of mnemonics, together with the monastics’ generally high baseline capacity for memorisation, increases confidence in the accuracy in early oral transmission.

In terms of the organisation and recitation of oral early Buddhist material, there exist two seemingly contradictory positions. Articulated by Anālayo (2011: 17) is the viewpoint that the intent of oral transmission was accurate transmission ‘for which free improvisation is inappropriate’. Anālayo (2011: 17) quoted Graham (1987: 138) in cautioning against confusing ‘oral transmission of scripture... with folk oral tradition in which verbatim accuracy is not aspired to’.

Cousins (2005: 96) offered a different perspective, suggesting that early recitation of material involved natural variations in precise form, just as ‘a traditional oral singer does not have a fixed text for a particular song’. He described early oral recitations not as monolithic wholes memorised verbatim, but rather as presenting a consistent story while being quite fluid in non-core details such as title, location, or level of detail (Cousins, 2005: 97).

The MMS provides evidence of both arguments. Consistency in the core verses exists in the virtually-identical Pāli *sutta* versions. The two Tibetan versions (Feer, 1883: 224; Skilling, 1993: 130) share a common core with each other and the Pāli versions, despite variability discussed below. Likewise, the two Chinese versions are closely related and obviously share similarities with the Pāli versions. At the same time, variations, particularly notable in Tibetan and Chinese versions, provide evidence for Cousins’ argument. Those variations include changes in these verse order and number, line order, title, and frame story (Appendix D). Also supporting Cousins’ argument for natural variation is that the following sentence from MMS frame story occurs verbatim in the frame story for other texts, including Sn 18, AN.III.330, AN.III.423, AN.IV.27, SN.I.1, SN.I.2, and SN.I.64:

*Atha kho aññatarā devatā abhikkantāya rattiyā abhikkantavaṇṇā kevalakappaṃ jetavanaṃ
obhāsetvā yena bhagavā tenupasaṅkami; upasaṅkamitvā bhagavantaṃ abhivādetvā ekamantaṃ
aṭṭhāsi.*

This sentence also occurs in AN.III.309, AN.III.331, SN.I.39, SN.I.43, SN.I.49, and SN.I.53, with only minor variations such as an additional word, number of *devas*, or change a location. Clearly not chance similarities, these are evidence of incorporating stock components, or ‘oral building blocks’ (Allon, 1997: 41; Wynne, 2004: 121). Thus the MMS displays both a core message in the main verses, very consistent within the Pāli Canon though less so in other transmissions, as well as variability among recensions in their non-core components.

4.2 Use in edification

The *Mangala Sutta*'s placement in the *Khuddaka-pāṭha* (Khp) is highly significant and indicates its importance for monastic education. Bhikkhu Bodhi (2017b: 6:44-6:55) described the *Khuddaka-pāṭha* (numbering up to eighteen texts, depending upon which edition is considered) as quite possibly 'compiled for the use of novice monks so that novice monks become familiar with a selection of very basic Buddhist texts'. This understanding is echoed in other descriptions the *Khuddaka-pāṭha* as a 'handbook for novices' (Abeynayake, 1984: 115; Norman: 1983: 58).

Placement within the *Khuddaka-pāṭha* does *not* imply that a text was necessarily considered one of the most important or profound of Buddhist teachings. Nor does inclusion imply, in isolation from other factors, that any of the texts is early. The *Ratana Sutta*, for example, is included yet is considered of a later stratum (Jayawickrama, 1976: 81; Pande, 2015, 64-65).

What such placement *does* imply is that the MMS was one of a handful of texts considered absolutely essential in monastic education. The *Khuddaka-pāṭha* content suggests these were texts deemed important for basic monastic education and, arguably, for a 'working monastic' in his or her interactions with laypeople. The texts included those that would have been commonly used in interactions with laypeople, including, for example, the traditional texts for 'going for refuge' and ten common questions and answers.

4.3 Devotional usage

The MMS's placement in the *Khuddaka-pāṭha* positioned it, alongside other texts in that collection, extraordinarily well for use in religious ceremonies. The vast majority of Southern Buddhist monastics over the millennia would have known the *Khuddaka-pāṭha* texts by memory. Skilling (1993: 102) affirmed this when discussing a fourteenth-century transmission from Ceylon to Tibet, mentioning that even monastic novices from Ceylon would have known the *paritta* by memory. Knowing these chants by heart would have made them obvious choices for recitation when the laity called upon monastics to offer chanting. And indeed, a triad of texts from the *Khuddaka-pāṭha* - the *Karaṇīya-metta Sutta*, the *Ratana Sutta* and the MMS - is the best-known of Southern Buddhism's *parittas*.

What came to be known as *paritta* chants in Southern Buddhism served exactly this purpose. The word '*paritta*' (Sinhala: *pirit* or *pirith*), commonly translated as 'protection', has alternative definitions of 'safeguard', 'charm, palliative, amulet' (PED, 2004: 426). It does not translate particularly well into English, and Westerners have had a number of ways of understanding it. Gombrich (1995: 246) commented that the *pirit*'s 'resemblance to magic will strike the western reader'. Some argue that the use of *paritta* is apotropaic (designed to ward off evil) and, as a ritual or rite, runs counter to basic Buddhist teachings (Crosby, 2014: 128). Alternative, non-apotropaic views of using *parittas* are offered by Gombrich (1995: 244) and Crosby (2014: 128). And *paritta* might also be understood as magic that offers a very real and useful placebo effect. Gombrich

reported this explanation of *pirit*, given by monks in the area of his field research: 'it (*pirit*) will only do you good if you have faith (*visvāsa*); you are protected by your own belief' (1995: 246).

However one views them, the fact is that *paritta* ceremonies were (and remain) important in Southern Buddhism. *Paritta* usage has a long history, with the *Catu-bhāṇavāra* dating from at least the tenth century (Gombrich, 1995: 237). Numerous *paritta* collections exist, for example the compilation of twenty-four *pirits* known as the '*pirith potha*', or the 'Book of Protection' or the *Catu-bhāṇavāra* (Piyadassa, 2008). And throughout these collections, one consistently finds the MMS.

Chapter 5: Parallel Transmissions

Examining parallel transmissions strengthens understanding of a *sutta* and how it has been interpreted over time and space. Although Theravāda texts are the oldest surviving Buddhist texts, they are not a definitive version and are ‘the result of a lengthy and complicated development’ (Hinuber, 2000: 5). Bucknell asserted that there is ‘no evidence that any particular line of transmission has preserved the discourses more faithfully than the others’ and that comparing Pāli *suttas* with other transmissions is important for developing a ‘maximally complete and clear picture’ (Bucknell, 2011: xx).

The following discussion extends to Pāli, Chinese and Tibetan transmissions in the broader context of how parallel transmissions inform understanding the MMS and its interpretations. Two key considerations are addressed: the ‘dual use’ of the MMS for edification and devotional or ceremonial purposes, and the consistency or accuracy of transmission of the MMS within and amongst the transmissions. The Tibetan and Chinese recensions share core messages with the Pāli MMS while also displaying variability consistent with Cousins’ argument for natural variations in transmission, as discussed in Chapter 4.

5.1 Pāli transmission

The dual use of the MMS has been addressed in the preceding discussion. What bears mentioning here is that multiple versions of the Pāli Canon exist, including that of the Pāli Text Society (PTS), Burmese, Sinhala and Thai. The PTS edition is referenced in this dissertation. Variations amongst these editions are minor and in the main not significant to the discussion at hand. The one difference found deserving mention is a Burmese edition’s (Myanmar.net, 2014a) addition of a short introduction, added to a text otherwise completely consistent with the PTS edition.

5.2 Tibetan transmission

Interestingly, clear awareness of the dual use of the MMS for education and ceremony is indicated in Tibetan transmissions. Appreciating this point requires a basic knowledge of the Tibetan Canon’s organisation.

The Tibetan Canon is divided into two parts: commentarial material in the *Tengyur* (*Tenjur*), and direct teachings and tantras in the *Kangyur* (*Kanjur*). The *Kangyur*’s divisions include one titled *Mdo* (Sk: *sūtra*), containing direct teachings, and one titled *Rgyud*, containing tantric material (de Koros, 2015 (1836–1839): 108).

Unsurprisingly, the MMS is found within the *Mdo*. Located in volume XXX, it is part of a collection of thirteen texts, which is ‘the only *group* of Theravādin texts in the *Kanjur*’ (Skilling 1993: 73). Transmitted in the early fourteenth century by the Sinhalese monk, Ānandaśrī, some of the

texts may well have been orally transmitted, as Ānandaśrī's monastic training in Ceylon would have invariably resulted in his knowing certain texts by memory, including the MMS (Skilling, 1993: 102).

Less expected is the second version of the MMS, occurring in the tantric segment of the Kangyur, in *Rgyud* XIX, folios 236-237. Its title, *Devapariṛchhā-maṅgalagāthā*, is comprised of *deva* (deity), *pariṛchhā* (question), *maṅgala* (auspicious), and *gāthā* (verses). Skilling (1993: 80) described this as 'an anonymous translation of a *Devapariṛchhā-maṅgalagāthā* of unknown school' and a recension of the MMS (Skilling, 1993: 130). Feer (1883: 223-226) provided side-by-side French translations of both versions, which he called '*Version du Sud*' and '*Version du Nord*' (Appendix D). Differences between these recensions include changes in verse order and number, the *Version du Nord* adding a prose closing, and referring to multiple deities in the prose introduction (Skilling 1993: 130). Feer's translations included fifteen verses for the *Version du Nord* and verses compared to twelve verses for the *Version du Sud*.

The placement of these versions in different divisions of the Tibetan Canon is significant. Placement of the *Version du Sud* in the *Mdo* suggests it was considered a text for teaching and study, whereas the *Version du Nord*'s placement in the *Rgyud* suggests intended tantric or devotional use. A review of summaries made by de Koros (2015(1836–1839): 257-265) of the *Rgyud* chapters clarifies that this body of work focused on practices such as ceremony, ritual, and offerings. Of the chapter containing the *Version du Nord*, de Koros (2015(1836–1839): 259) wrote: '*Tantras* treating of the practices of devotees', which seemingly aligns with *paritta* uses in Southern Buddhism. Additionally, the placement of the *Mdo* version (as part of the set of thirteen Theravāda texts) at the end of the division may have been a nod to its *paritta* function, as Tibetan editors 'placed various prayers and auspicious verses at the end of other divisions' (Skilling, 1993: 83). The occurrence of the two MMS versions in two separate genres within the Kangyur indicates a sensitivity to its dual uses for teaching and study as well as tantric, ritual, ceremonial, or devotional practice.

Regarding translation, Rochard (2018) confirmed there is no English translation of the Tibetan versions. Feer's French translations² were, for this study, translated into English by a French layperson, Rebours-Smith (2018)(Appendix D).

5.3 Chinese transmission

The Chinese transmission conveys little information as to if or how the MMS was understood or used. No evidence was found of direct use of the MMS for education or ceremony, and understanding of these uses is only implied by text placement.

The MMS occurs in two of the four versions of Chinese *Dhammapada* (Beal, 1878: 2). Although the Pāli *Dhammapada* does not contain the MMS, the two Chinese *Dhammapadas* do. The Taishō (T) printed edition, long considered the definitive collection of Chinese Buddhist texts,

² The accuracy of other of Feer's translations has been questioned by Anālayo (2016: 100).

contains these two *Dhammapadas* in the fourth scroll, indicated ‘T.IV’ (ntireader.org, 2018): the *Fǎjù Jīng* (法句經) (T.IV.210), and the *Fǎjù PìYù Jīng* (法句譬喻經) (T.IV.211). Both conclude with texts (T.IV.210, 609a11-609b15 and T.IV.211, 574c29) titled *JíXiáng Pǐn* (吉祥品, *Maṅgala Vagga*). Note that word *Pǐn* (品) is used and *not* the word ‘*Jīng*’ (經), which is the character normally used for ‘*sutta*’ or ‘classic’.

Beal (1878: 30) dated the *Fǎjù Jīng* in the early-to-mid third century C.E., first transmitted in 223 C.E. from India from an unnamed school. Beal (1878: 21) placed the *Fǎjù PìYù Jīng* later, between A.D. 265 and A.D. 313, not specifying a school.

The *Fǎjù PìYù Jīng* is a largely-identical but expanded version of the *Fǎjù Jīng*, adding *PìYù* (譬喻), which Beal (1878: 21) translated as ‘metaphors’ or ‘parables’ and understood as *Jātakas*. Importantly, he concluded these were *not* the same as the Pāli Canon *Jātakas*, hypothesising ‘the parables were invented (by Chinese editors) to suit the text’ (Beal, 1878: 23). If correct, despite T.IV texts being classified as *BěnyuánBù* (本緣部, *Jātaka* and *Avadāna*) (ntireader.org, 2019), they should *not* be taken as translations of the Pāli Canon *Jātakas*. Beal’s translation (1878: 174-176) of the MMS in the *Fǎjù PìYù Jīng* obviously is not a parallel of either Pāli Canon MMS *Jātaka* (Appendix D).

Beal translated the *JíXiáng Pǐn* (*Fǎjù PìYù Jīng* version) as ‘Good Fortune’ and asserted the text ‘agrees with the “*Mahāmaṅgala Sutta*” of the *Sutta Nipāta*’. This is correct, as core messages were transmitted intact, despite three obvious differences in the Chinese text: a quite different prose introduction and an added prose conclusion; four additional verses (totaling sixteen); and modified verse and line orders. Similarly, the *Fǎjù Jīng* version is ‘related but different’, having neither prose introduction nor conclusion, and line and verse orders virtually identical to the *Fǎjù PìYù Jīng* version, but with three added verses (totaling nineteen). The closely-related Chinese versions are obviously linked to the MMS. They could be based upon a recension of an unknown school, as is the Tibetan *Version du Nord*, or simply an adapted form of the Pāli Canon version. Whatever the origin, they carry a distinctive Chinese sense, apparent in this (original) translation of a phrase shared by both Chinese versions: V6. 居孝事父母 (*Jū xiào shì fùmǔ*)- ‘filial piety and serving one’s parents’.

Placement in the Chinese *Dhammapadas* suggests the MMS was understood as a text for study and teaching. Its devotional use is *perhaps* implied by its positioning at the end of the *Dhammapada*. Skilling (1993: 83) observed that Tibetan editors placed auspicious verses at the end of divisions of text; it is possible Chinese editors likewise did this, but direct evidence is lacking.

Separate from the Taishō versions of the *JíXiáng Pǐn* are twentieth-century Chinese translations of the Pāli Canon MMS, entitled *JíXiáng Jīng* (吉祥經). These *do* use the expected word ‘*Jīng*’ (經) for ‘*sutta*’. Some modern translations utilise traditional ‘Buddhist Chinese’, a terse and cryptic literary style, while others opt for more readily-accessible language. Compare these translations of the *sutta*’s opening, ‘Thus have I heard’: 如是我聞 (*Rúshì wǒwén*) (Dhammavaro, 2007:

1-3), literally ‘such as is I heard’, versus 這是我聽佛陀說的 (*Zhèshì wǒ tīng fótuó shuōde*) (Hanh, 2016), literally ‘This is what I heard from the Buddha’. Both capture the sense of the original, though Dhammavaro’s translation follows more closely than Hanh’s. These modern translations are not to be confused with the early recensions from the Chinese *Dhammapadas*.

Chapter 6: Hermeneutics and Interpreting the MMS

This chapter focuses on hermeneutics, or interpretations, of the MMS. Elements of an ‘improvisational Buddhist hermeneutic’ are explored and applied to the MMS. Discussion of the content of the *sutta*, provided in Pāli and English translation, focuses on the verses assessed in Chapter 3 as of early origin.

6.1 Towards an improvisational Buddhist hermeneutic

That the term ‘hermeneutics’ describes an extraordinary variety of approaches stems from three issues. First, the word ‘hermeneutics’ itself, derived from a Greek root meaning to translate or interpret, points to the process of interpretation; yet it also encompasses understanding meaning of a text (or other subject of interpretation), practices for extracting meaning, principles for how to extract meaning, other activities that can influence interpretation, and ‘the analysis of the principles of interpretation’ (Gilhus, 2014:283). Although often associated with Biblical studies, hermeneutics is applicable to many fields in the human and social sciences. Broadly understood to be grounded in rational methods and theories of interpretation, beyond that rather rudimentary conceptualisation, there is striking variability in how the term is applied in actual practice.

And this is exactly the second issue, that there exists a plethora of hermeneutical approaches. Divergent inquiries generate divergent needs and methods, just as different areas of mathematics, such as geometry, statistics, or calculus, require different tools. Hermeneutics can be described by authorship, such as Gadamer’s hermeneutics, or characterised by application, such as theological, philosophical, or philological hermeneutics. The term ‘Buddhist hermeneutics’ likewise encompasses varied approaches. The *Abhidhamma* itself, for example, might be considered a Buddhist hermeneutic (Thurman, 1978, 20). In Western academic circles, Thurman (1978: 19) wrote the first article on ‘Buddhist Hermeneutics’, focusing on principles of interpretation and arguing for the central role of reason and the rational, with the implied focus being the interpreter. Numerous Buddhist hermeneutics have emerged, including ‘Ambedkar’s Hermeneutics’ (Queen, 1996: 60), ‘Vajra Hermeneutics’, ‘Ch’an Hermeneutics’ (Lopez, 1988: v), and various ‘hermeneutical phases within Chinese Buddhism’ (Chappell, 1998: 175).

The third issue is choosing the focus, or locus, of interpretation. Benson (2006: 195) outlined four such loci: the author and author’s intention, the text, the interpreter, and the interpretive community. Scholars have tended to favour one or a subset of these four, for example Gadamer’s emphasis on the interplay between text and interpreter, or Queen’s focus on an individual, Ambedkar. Benson (2006: 200-204) compellingly argued for and demonstrated the interplay and interdependence of all four of these elements, using the clever analogy of jazz improvisation. His ‘improvisational hermeneutic’ included an author and author’s intention (composer and the intent

to write a piece encouraging improvisation), text (the structure of the composition), the interpreter (jazz musician), and the interpretive community (the musical tradition of jazz).

Benson's jazz analogy illustrates a dynamic, interactive and ongoing interplay among these four loci. Figure 2 provides a graphical depiction of interrelationships among these loci. This framework is not one to be imposed in order to extract static truths from a text, but instead is to be used to develop clarity about dynamic, fluid processes and interactions among the loci. This can certainly be usefully applied to an 'improvisational Buddhist hermeneutic', and one can reasonably deduce that the richest interpretative experiences would be found where the most loci interaction.

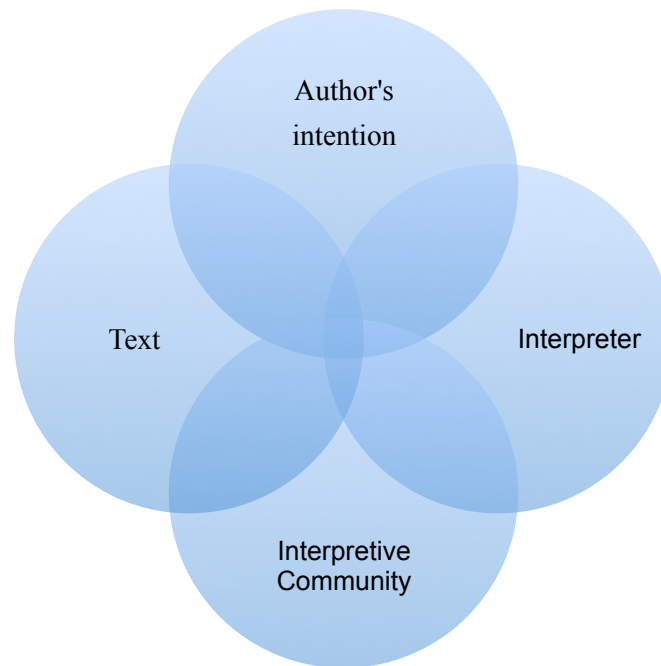


Figure 2: Venn diagram of Benson's four loci of improvisational hermeneutics

6.2 The first locus: the author and author's intention

The first locus of an improvisational Buddhist hermeneutic clearly points to the Buddha and his intention to share teachings that point to awakening. Here it is useful to consider the statement that 'no text stands alone...we can never write about one ancient text without looking at many others' (Schaps, 2011: 43) alongside the characterisation of EBTs as having a distinctive style conveying 'the flavour of a single and exceptional creator' (Sujato and Brahmali, 2015: 77). Together, these point to the realistic possibility of understanding the Buddha's key messages in support of his overarching intention, and it stands to reason that clues about those messages would emerge from study of the oldest stratum of the Buddha's teaching identified to date. Fortunately, we have such texts in the collections, the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* and the *Pārāyana-vagga*. And fortunately, there exists such a study of the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* in the work of Fronsdal (2016).

Fronsdal (2016, 10-19) identified four prominent, recurring themes in the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga*, themes which can be taken as four key messages of the Buddha's teaching; these occur again and again, as a kind of drumbeat of early teachings: letting go of opinions, views, doctrines and religious teachings; letting go of sensual desires; describing the qualities of a sage; and 'training, or the practices conducive to peace and becoming a sage'. Fronsdal substantiated these themes well, and his arguments need not be repeated here. While his work did not extend to the *Pārāyana-vagga*, review of those verses reveals similar themes: letting go, abandoning sensual desires, and training³. For example, the fourth theme of training is expressed unequivocally in both collections: 'Train in your own full release' (*Aṭṭhaka-vagga*, Sn 940; Fronsdal, 2016: 125); '...you should train for your own *nibbāna*' (*Pārāyana-vagga*, Sn 1061; Bodhi, 2017a: 333).

Another such drumbeat is the Buddha's movement away from reliance on rites, rituals, or other people and towards self-reliance. Avoidance of dependencies was sometimes framed as not relying on other people, sometimes as not relying on anything at all, including concepts such as 'mine'. Examples include: 'It is internally that he should achieve peace; a Bhikkhu should not seek peace through another' (*Aṭṭhaka-vagga*, Sn 919; Bodhi, 2017a: 312); '...a mindful Bhikkhu should not cling to anything in the entire world' (*Pārāyana-vagga*, Sn 1104; Bodhi, 2017a: 341). Closely connected to self-reliance was re-conceptualisation, another hallmark of early teachings. It is well known the Buddha re-conceptualised popular words or concepts of the time, such as '*kamma*' (A.III.410), '*brahman*' (Ud 3), or '*maṅgala*' (Sn 258), infusing them with new meanings.

Rational inquiry was a seventh drumbeat, with awakening and perfected wisdom presented 'as the culmination of the most rational inquiry, not at the cost of reason' (Thurman, 1978: 25). Early teachings repeatedly focused on behaviours of body, speech and mind aimed at creating causes and conditions understood to be helpful for these goals, and avoiding unhelpful behaviours. This encouragement to contemplate and experience the truth of cause and effect was, in the earliest teachings, not presented in doctrinal form like *kamma-vipāka* but is nonetheless clearly evident.

In sum, the oft-repeated key themes, or drumbeats, in the Buddha's early teachings are identified here as:

- letting go of opinions, views, doctrines and religious teachings;
- letting go of sense desires;
- describing the qualities of a sage;
- 'training, or the practices conducive to peace' (Fronsdal, 2016: 19);
- self-reliance;
- re-conceptualisation;
- rational inquiry.

³ Descriptions of the qualities of a sage are not prominent in this *vagga*.

Significantly, these themes all describe processes, not doctrines. They are given in the spirit of what Thurman (1988: 125) described as that of the poet who ‘seeks not to clarify or persuade, but to intrigue and to evoke’. Taking any of them as doctrine would be in direct conflict with letting go of doctrines. Also pointing to processes is Fronsdal’s (2016: 2) observation that these teachings are of value not for ‘the profundity of their philosophy or their authority as “scripture”’; rather, they are valuable for the results they bring to those who live by them’.

The MMS reflects six of these themes and is not inconsistent with the seventh. The first is absolutely central to the MMS and closely tied to the Buddha’s re-conceptualisation of ‘*maṅgala*’. The Buddha taught in a time in which superstitious beliefs and practices were common, and in the dominant Brahmanical culture, there was a heavy reliance on rites and rituals. This is reflected in the MMS frame story, which describes an ongoing debate amongst both gods (*devas*) and humans as to what was most auspicious, what was the highest or best (*mahā*) omen or blessing (*maṅgala*). The Buddha shifted the understanding of what is *maṅgala* away from superstitious belief and towards beneficial actions one can undertake that enable good fortune to naturally arise as a consequence of wholesome actions. This is also strongly related to rationality and self-reliance.

The MMS verses also reflect the theme of describing qualities of a sage. It names, for example, qualities of patience and austerity, while also adding characteristics applicable to laypeople, such as responsibility to one’s family and being skillful in one’s craft or trade.

The theme of training is strongly evident in the MMS, in a form adapted for the laity. The MMS offers a thorough set of training guidelines useful for daily life and spiritual development (see section 6.4).

Also central to the MMS are themes of self-reliance and rational inquiry. The whole of the *sutta* invites inquiry and infers how one’s actions produce positive results, thus advocating self-reliance. The obviously-relevant doctrinal framework of *kamma-vipāka* (cause and effect) is not explicitly mentioned, yet the *sutta* is a teaching in *kamma-vipāka* ‘as profound as it comes’, as Adkins commented in the interview for this research.

The one theme that does *not* show up strongly in the MMS is letting go of sensual desires. Much of the *sutta* addresses householder life, in which sensual desire was and is an integral part. The text nowhere mentions actively decreasing desires, yet nowhere encourages *increasing* sensual desire. Thus it is not inconsistent with this theme.

6.3 The second locus: the text

The locus of the text in one respect is quite straightforward, and here the MMS is presented in Pāli (Soni, 2018: 17-19) and English translation (Bodhi, 2017a: 199-200). Yet challenges of translation quickly become evident, as discussed below.

Mahā-maṅgala Sutta

Evaṃ me suttaṃ ekaṃ samayaṃ bhagava Sāvattihyaṃ viharati Jetavane Anāthapindikassa ārāme. atha kho aññatarā devatā abhikkantāya rattiyaṃ abhikkantavannā kevalakappaṃ jetavanaṃ obhāsetvā yena bhagavā ten'upasankami. upasamkamitvā bhagavantaṃ abhivādetvā ekamantaṃ aṭṭhāsi. ekamantaṃ t̥hitā kho sā devatā bhagavantaṃ gāthāya ajjhabhāsi.

- V1. Bahū devā manussā ca, maṅgalāni acintayum;
ākaṅkhamānā sotthānaṃ, brūhi maṅgalamuttamaṃ.
- V2. Asevanā ca bālānaṃ, paṇḍitānañca sevā;
pūjā ca pūjaneyyānaṃ, etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.
- V3. Patirūpadesavāso ca, pubbe ca katapuññatā;
attasammāpaṇidhi ca, etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.
- V4. Bāhusaccañca sippaṅca, vinayo ca susikkhito;
subhāsītā ca yā vācā, etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.
- V5. Mātāpitu upaṭṭhānaṃ, puttadārassa saṅgaho;
anākulā ca kammantā, etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.
- V6. Dānañca dhammacariyā ca, ñātakānañca saṅgaho;
anavajjāni kammāni, etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.
- V7. Āratī viratī pāpā, majjapānā ca saṃyamo;
appamādo ca dhammesu, etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.
- V8. Gāravo ca nivāto ca, santuṭṭhi ca kataññutā;
kālena dhammassavanaṃ, etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.
- V9. Khantī ca sovacassatā, samaṇānañca dassanaṃ;
kālena dhammasākacchā, etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.
- V10. Tapo ca brahmacariyañca, ariyasaccāna dassanaṃ;
nibbānasacchikiriyā ca, etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.
- V11. Phuṭṭhassa lokadhammehi, cittaṃ yassa na kampaṭi;
asokaṃ virajaṃ khemaṃ, etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.
- V12. Etādisāni katvāna, sabbatthamaṇarājita;
sabbattha sotthiṃ gacchanti, taṃ tesaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ' ti.

Blessings (*Mahāmaṅgala Sutta*)

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvattḥī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park. Then, when the night had advanced, a certain deity of stunning beauty, having illuminated the entire Jeta's Grove, approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, stood on one side, and addressed the Blessed One in verse:

V1. Many devas and human beings
have reflected on blessings,
longing for safety,
so declare the highest blessing.

V2. "Not associating with fools,
associating with the wise,
and venerating those worthy of veneration:
this is the highest blessing.

V3. Residing in a suitable place,
merit done in the past,
and directing oneself rightly:
this is the highest blessing.

V4. Much learning, a craft,
a well-trained discipline,
and well-spoken speech:
this is the highest blessing.

V5. Serving one's mother and father,
maintaining a wife and children,
and an honest occupation:
this is the highest blessing.

V6. Giving and righteous conduct,
assistance to relatives,
blameless deeds:
this is the highest blessing.

V7. Desisting and abstaining from evil,
refraining from intoxicating drink,
heedfulness in good qualities:
this is the highest blessing.

V8. Reverence and humility,
contentment and gratitude,
timely listening to the Dhamma:
this is the highest blessing.

V9. Patience, being amenable to advice,
the seeing of ascetics,
timely discussion on the Dhamma:
this is the highest blessing.

V10. Austerity and the spiritual life,
seeing of the noble truths,
and the realisation of nibbāna:
this is the highest blessing.

V11. One whose mind does not shake
when touched by worldly conditions,
sorrowless, dust free, secure:
this is the highest blessing.

V12. Those who have done these things
are victorious everywhere;
everywhere they go safely:
theirs is that highest blessing.

Discussions of the MMS often refer to the *sutta*'s suggested practices as thirty-eight *maṅgalas*. Soni (2018, 14-17) and Ñāṇādicca (1955: 40-255) have written excellent detailed explanations of these. Soni's English translations are listed below and also, copied alongside their Pāli equivalents, in Appendix F. Designations 'M' are included for consistency with Table 3.

- M1. Not associating with fools.
- M2. Associating with the wise.
- M3. Reverencing those worthy of respect.
- M4. Residence in a suitable locality.
- M5. Having made merit in the past.
- M6. One's mind properly directed.
- M7. Profound learning.
- M8. Proficiency in one's work.
- M9. Well-learned moral discipline
- M10. Gracious kindly speech.
- M11. Giving support to parents.
- M12. Cherishing wife and children.
- M13. Business pursuits, peaceful and free from conflicts.
- M14. Acts of giving.
- M15. Conduct according to Dhamma.
- M16. Helping one's relatives.
- M17. Blameless actions.
- M18. Shunning evil.
- M19. Abstaining from evil.
- M20. Refraining from intoxicants.
- M21. Diligence in practice of what is Dhamma.
- M22. Reverence.
- M23. Humility.
- M24. Contentment.
- M25. Gratefulness.
- M26. Timely hearing of the Dhamma
- M27. Patience
- M28. Meekness when corrected.
- M29. Meeting (seeing) monks.
- M30. Discussing the Dhamma at the proper time.
- M31. Energetic self-restraint.
- M32. Holy and chaste life.
- M33. Insight into the Noble Truths.
- M34. Realization of Nibbāna.
- M35. A mind unshaken by the ups and downs of life.
- M36. Freedom from sorrow.

M37. Freedom from defilements of passion.

M38. Perfect security.

With these thirty-eight *maṅgalas* presented in its twelve verses, the MMS presents the full trajectory of Buddhist practice, from the most basic decisions of the company one keeps up to and including full realisation of *nibbāna* (*nirvana*) and living in the world with the wisdom arising from awakening. V1 through V10 describe increasingly-refined expressions of living in the world skillfully and ethically. Advice is offered on everyday interactions such as relationships with friends and family, learning, training and work, and using gracious speech. The MMS names useful and desirable qualities such as generosity, diligence, humility, contentment and patience. It invites inner reflection through, for example, ‘directing oneself rightly’, ‘abstaining from evil’, and ‘being amenable to advice’ (Bodhi, 2017a: 199-200). The applications of these thirty-eight *maṅgalas* are further indicated in Table 3. The *sutta*’s comprehensiveness substantiates Prebist’s (1993: 56) claim that the MMS is ‘among the most important Theravāda texts’ on ethics or *sīla*.

And the MMS continues, further addressing *samādhi* and *pañña*, or concentration and insight. ‘*Samādhi*’ is frequently translated as ‘concentration’, yet Brasington’s (2015: 5) translation of ‘indefectibility’, albeit not (yet) a recognised English word, offers excellent alignment with the use of ‘unshaken’ in the MMS: ‘*Phuṭṭhassa lokadhammehi cittaṃ yassa na kampati*’, or ‘A mind unshaken by the ups and downs of life’ (Soni, 2018: 69). The MMS further offers that, with the wisdom borne of an ‘indefectible’ mind, one can live in the world in peace (*khemam*) and with an absence of sorrow (*asokaṃ*).

The accessibility of this rich and profound teaching greatly depends on translations, which vary considerably (Appendix D). Such variability stems in part from influences on the translator, whether personal or cultural experiences, biases, or other factors. Gadamer, intending no negative connotation, termed these ‘prejudices’. Variability also arises due to complexities of the canonical text, with many Pāli words having multiple meanings, particular cultural context, or nuances that cannot be entirely captured in translation. As early as 1896, Rhys-Davids (1999(1896): 37) recognised this difficulty, noting that with certain types of content it is ‘impossible, without expansion that spoil[s] the set of the thought, or the learned notes that ruin the poetry, to convey the full sense of the original’.

Illustrative of variability in translation are extracts, presented in Table 2, from the MMS translated by Piyadassa (1999), Thanissaro (1994), and Bodhi (2017a: 199-200). Variations begin with the very title of the *sutta*. The word ‘*maṅgala*’ has no direct English equivalent, and common translations are ‘blessing’, ‘protection’, or ‘good fortune’. Hanh (2007: 32; Appendix D) used ‘happiness’, departing from the word’s literal translation, offering the explanation that ‘*maṅgala*’ means ‘those things that bring happiness’.

Table 2: Examples of alternative translations in the MMS

MMS line (in Pāli)	Piyadassa (1999)	Thanissaro (1994)	Bodhi (2017a: 199-200)
<i>maṅgala</i>	blessing	protection	blessing
V4. <i>Bāhusaccañca sippañca, vinayo ca...</i>	V4. Vast learning, skill in handicrafts, well grounded in discipline...	V4. Broad knowledge, skill, well-mastered discipline...	V4. Much learning, a craft, a well-trained discipline...
V5. <i>Mātāpitu upaṭṭhānaṃ, puttadārassa saṅgaho; anākulā ca kammantā...</i>	V5. To support one's father and mother; to cherish one's wife and children, and to be engaged in peaceful occupations...	V5. Support for one's parents, assistance to one's wife and children, consistency in one's work...	V5. Serving one's mother and father, maintaining a wife and children, and an honest occupation...
V7. <i>...appamādo ca dhammesu...</i>	V7. ...and diligent in performing righteous acts...	V7. ...being heedful of the qualities of the mind...	V7. ...heedfulness in good qualities...
V9. <i>Khantī ca sovacassatā, samañānañca dassanaṃ...</i>	V9. Patience, obedience, meeting the Samanas (holy men)...	V9. Patience, compliance, seeing contemplatives...	v9. Patience, being amenable to advice, the seeing of ascetics...

Variations in translation are significant because they can greatly impact a reader's assessment of the text's relevance in the world. To an office worker, 'skill in handicrafts' might seem totally irrelevant, whereas the same word translated as 'skill' could hold great meaning. Similarly, to many Westerners, the word 'obedience' is more off-putting than 'being amenable to advice'. And 'serving' one's parents, to some, will be perceived much differently than providing 'support for' them. The challenge is to adequately adapt translations to prevailing cultural and linguistic norms while staying true to the text. Awkward, stilted, or archaic language can inhibit the reader's ability to engage effectively with the text.

6.4 The third locus: interpreters and their interpretations

While many translations of the MMS exist, interpretations tend to be verse-by-verse, commentarial-style works. Discussed in this section focuses on the few that offer interpretations that consider the *sutta* as a whole.

6.4.1 Classification systems

The MMS clearly outlines a useful set of suggestions for everyday life, and one way of interpreting it has been to classify those suggestions within a ‘synthetic view’ (Soni, 2018: 71). Review of the available literature revealed three such overviews of the MMS. Those overviews and their placement of each of the thirty-eight individual *maṅgalas* are summarised in Table 3. The full outlines of Soni’s classification and Bodhi’s Ground Plan appear in Appendices G and H, respectively.

The first system, that of Maṅgala U Ba Than of Burma, uses the basic headings of *sīla-samādhī-pañña* (Soni, 2018: 72). U Ba Than orally transmitted this framework to Soni, who modified the framework from *sīla-samādhī-pañña* to ‘four phases’. Soni (2018: 71-77) published his own and U Ba Than’s schema alongside each other, noting areas of convergence and divergence. The third system, developed by Bodhi (2005b), does not use the *sīla-samādhī-pañña* framework.

Though varying in their exact classifications, these overviews share the basic emphasis on describing a complete path of practice, starting from the most basic and culminating in full awakening. These schema present easy-to-understand overviews of the entire *sutta*, overviews useful to both monastics and lay practitioners in understanding not only the trajectory of the path of practice, but also the various arcs of practice of which that trajectory is composed.

Table 3. Three MMS schema⁴

Mangalas (M1 – M38)	U Ba Than	Soni	Bodhi
M1-M6	<u>Sīla: moral culture</u> Fundamental rules: M1-M6	<u>Phase I: Preparation</u> Laying the Right Foundation M1-M5 Right Planning M6	Orientation: M1-M3 Establishing secure foundations: M4-M6
M7-M10	Essential training of the senses, body, mind and speech: M7-M10	Right Training M7-M10	Preparations: M7-M10
M11 -M13	The foundation of the domestic order: M11-M13	<u>Phase II: Wayfaring in the world:</u> Basic Responsibilities: M11-M13	Leading a virtuous life in the world: Fulfilling family responsibilities: M11-M13
M14 -M17	Social welfare: M14-M17	Social Obligations: M14-M17	Becoming a pillar of society: M14 -M17
M18 –M21	Protection against evil: M18-M21	Self-Protection: M18-M20 Conservation of Personal Progress: M21	Personal ethics: M18-M21
M22-M30	<u>Samādhi: mental culture</u> M22 M23 M24 M25 M26 M27-M30	Cultivation of Higher Qualities: M22-M26 <u>Phase III: Spiritual growth</u> Spiritual Eligibility: M27-M28 Contact with Religious Life: M29-M30	Developing a spiritual life: M22-M30
M31-M38	<u>Paññā: wisdom culture</u> M31-M38	On the Path: M31-M34 The Fruit: M35-M38	The ascent towards realization: M31-M34 Fulfillment: M35-M38
		<u>Phase IV: The Conclusion of Life: The Summum Bonum:</u> 1. Perfect invincibility of the person 2. Durable happiness.	

⁴ See pp. 29-30 and Appendix F for details of M1-M38.

6.4.2 The MMS as a *gihi vinaya*

Another way the MMS has been understood is as a code of conduct for laypeople, or *gihi* (*grhin*) (householder) *vinaya* (code of conduct). Few Buddhist teachings clearly delineate proactive ethical undertakings for laypeople. The ethical guidance of the precepts is given in language of refraining or abstaining, rather than acting proactively. Other teachings, for example those pertaining to the *Brahma Viharas*, describe cultivating positive mental states but without detail of how exactly that might be applied in everyday situations. The MMS details specific wholesome positive actions for laypeople to undertake in daily life.

Mendis (1994: 199) specifically named the MMS and the *Sigālovada Sutta* (D.III.180) together as generally providing ‘a Code for Discipline for lay people (*gihi vinaya*)...’ with ‘implications for social, economic, and psychological well-being for the individuals in particular and the community in general’. ‘*Gihi vinaya*’ might sound at first a contrived co-opting of the word *vinaya*, traditionally used for monastic codes of discipline. And yet over the years, various *gihi vinaya* have been offered as guidelines for lay Buddhists. Examples include the twelfth-century *Upasakamanussavinaya*, and Anagarika Dharmapala’s 1898 *Gihivinaya* (Crosby, 2006, 177-187). Here Crosby’s explanation is useful in understanding the intention of the *gihi vinaya*, that it refers ‘to a general code of conduct rather than to a set of specific regulations’ (Crosby, 2006: 3). Using this frame, the MMS can be viewed as a proactive, comprehensive, and immensely practical *gihi vinaya*.

6.5 The Fourth Locus: Interpretive Communities

Just as a single *sutta* must be understood in the context of the body of teachings in which it is found, an individual’s interpretation must be considered in the context of the wider community. The unique characteristics, needs, social and cultural histories of communities influence how, and indeed if, attention is given to and meaning extracted from a text.

In the West, Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna lineages coexist, while new communities such as the Triratna Buddhist Community and secular Buddhism have emerged. Each represents a unique interpretive community, as do other formal and informal communities. Widening the lens to Eastern and Western interpretive communities has value in understanding overall patterns of usage of the MMS, acknowledging that doing so necessitates using such characterisations that have obvious limitations of insensitivity to diversity. In the following very broad discussion, the ‘East’ refers to Asian countries where more than 50% of the population identifies as Buddhist and the MMS is actively used. The ‘West’ refers to countries in North America, Europe, and Australasia.

6.5.1 Usage of the MMS in the East

Aligning with historic uses, in Southern Buddhism the MMS is used both as an educational tool and as a *paritta*. Widely recognised as well-used and frequently-chanted, Brasington’s recollection during the interview for this research is representative of this broad agreement, ‘I

remember Ayya (KHEMA) saying that it was very beloved in the East and was chanted almost as frequently as the *Metta Sutta*'.

The MMS is one of several texts frequently chanted in *paritta* ceremonies, used for a wide variety of situations including, for example: funerals, new undertakings like marriage, starting college, new employment, consecrating a new building or business, or healing (Bodhi, 2017b: 7:35; Crosby 2014: 127-128). *Paritta* ceremonies vary in length from short chants to seven days and seven nights (Crosby, 2014: 126). And Bodhi (2017a) noted that 'almost invariably' the MMS will be selected for chanting, 'because it's believed it has the power to bring about the fulfillment of one's good and wholesome wishes'.

While there exist many different *paritta* chants, the MMS holds a special place alongside the *Karaṇīya-metta Sutta* and *Ratana Sutta*, these three being key constituents of the *mahā-paritta* (Sinhala: *maha-pirit* or *maha-piritha*), which is a collection of *parittas*. The exact content of *paritta* collections varies by country or even region (Crosby, 2014: 126), with the MMS consistently included.

The MMS is also used for education, having wide appeal and providing 'lessons of practical application, capable of immediate and fruitful use by people in all walks of life, irrespective of differences of sex or status, race or religion' (Soni, 2018: xii). Modern usage of the MMS has widened to include educational uses for laypeople, both adults and children.

Soni (2018: 9) described the MMS as 'one of the first lessons a child in Burma learns by heart'. In the East, Buddhist Sunday schools are organised for general *Dhamma* education, with the MMS featuring as one of several key texts. The Maṅgala Vihara Buddhist Temple in Singapore, for example, teaches children as young as four years old the *maṅgalas*, while older children study the MMS itself (Maṅgala Vihara, 2018). Another example is the Buddhist Institute Sunday School in Malaysia, with over a thousand students (in 1999) ranging in age from 6 to 25 years old, and which prepares students for Buddhist exams that include questions about the MMS (BISDS, 2018). For older children, *Dhamma* camps sometimes focus specifically on and facilitate investigation of the MMS. Examples include a 4-day '*Maṅgala Sutta* Teenagers Learning Camp' organised by the Nalanda *Dhamma* School in Malaysia (Nalanda, 2018a), and the '*Maṅgala Sutta* Study Camp' of the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia (YBAM, 2018). Nalanda Youth Centre organised a four-session '*Maṅgala Sutta*' Commentary Course for improving youth's knowledge and practice of the *Dhamma*. For adults, the Nalanda Institute offers a formal course entitled '*Maṅgala Sutta*: Discourse on Highest Blessings' (Nalanda, 2018b).

A traditional and common form of teaching *Dhamma* is commentarial-style talks in which an experienced practitioner, traditionally a monastic but in modern times sometimes a layperson, reads and then explains a text, typically line-by-line or verse-by-verse. In the East, the MMS is used in this way as a basis for single talks or series of talks. New modes of delivery such as recorded talks

supplement traditional delivery methods. Online talks by Eastern teachers in non-English languages on the MMS are numerous and available on online platforms such as monastic websites, social media, and online repositories.

6.5.2 Usage in the West

The MMS is used in the West by both Eastern and Western teachers but in somewhat different ways. Usage by Eastern teachers is addressed first.

For decades, Eastern teachers have come to the West to give teachings or establish monasteries or centres of practice. Southern Buddhist teachers and a smaller number of Mahāyāna teachers make use of the MMS. (It appears not used by the Tibetan Buddhist community, unsurprising given that Skilling (1993: 133) identified it as not popular in Tibet.)

One use of the MMS is as a topic for (English-language) commentarial-style teachings. Occurring in written, audio, or video format, these may be available in person, printed form, or online. Examples include writings (Hanh, 2017), online talks (Goenke, 2019), and online texts (Myanmar.net, 2014b). The MMS is also sometimes taught as part of Buddhist Sunday school curriculum. The Sri Lankan monk Rewatha Thero, for example, offers such a school at the Scottish Buddhist Vihara (Scotland's Buddhist Vihara, 2009). Ajahn Candasiri remarked in the interview for this study that, when a group from that Vihara visited Milntuim Hermitage, 'the children sitting in the front row were all chanting along with us' as the MMS was recited.

In contrast, Western teachers, as a whole, are less likely to use the MMS in teaching. A handful of teachers were identified who have proactively taught the MMS, directly and fully: Bhikkhu Bodhi, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Yuttadhammo Bhikkhu, Sangharakshita, Kim Allen, James Baraz, Kamala Masters, and Sharon Beckman-Brindley. Yet these are the exception rather than the rule. Illustrating this, a December 2018 Google search for '*mangala sutta*' restricted to videos over twenty minutes long yielded 189 results; of those, English-language talks by Westerners included only those by Bhikkhu Bodhi and Yuttadhammo Bhikkhu. Similar results were found on sites with archived *Dhamma* talks. Using the search terms '*mangala*', '*mangala sutta*' or 'highest blessings', a search of the 2,748 talks on dharmaseed.org yielded nine talks, seven of which were by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Two Western teachers used the MMS as a contemplation (DharmaSeed.org, 2011; Insight Meditation Community of Charlottesville, 2018).

The MMS is sometimes incorporated into *Dhamma* study materials. In online teaching, Olendzki incorporated the MMS verses into his online 'Living with Integrity' teaching programme, providing commentary, translation of key words and phrases, and offering ways to practice and investigate the content of the MMS (integrateddharmainstitute.org, 2018). Uses in study materials of the Samatha Trust and Triratna Buddhist Community are discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7: Interviews and Relevant Findings

This chapter presents findings of interviews with Western *Dhamma* teachers of primarily Western students. These interviews were intended to provide insights into current uses of the MMS by these experienced teachers and to reveal the challenges and opportunities they perceive in raising the profile of the *sutta* in the West. ‘Interviewee’ and ‘respondent’ are used somewhat interchangeably in the following discussion.

7.1 Interviewees and their communities

The process of interviewee selection was described in Chapter 2. Seven interviews were conducted, six by video call and one by email, with three female and four male senior *Dhamma* teachers, representing seven communities. Table 4 provides details for the seven interviewees, adding information included for two individuals who declined interviews due to not using the MMS in their teaching but who agreed to being included in research findings. The views and uses of the MMS by respondents are not necessarily shared by other members of their community.

Table 4. Respondents and their communities

Name	Title or role	Community name	Community location	Country
Respondents / Interviewees				
Rob Adkins	<i>Dhamma</i> teacher	Samatha Trust	Manchester	England
Leigh Brasington	<i>Jhāna</i> and insight teacher	No institutional affiliation	Oakland, California	USA
Ajahn Candasiri	Senior nun and <i>Sīladhara</i>	Theravāda Forest Sangha	Milntuim Hermitage, Comrie	Scotland
Murray Corke	<i>Dharmacarya</i> and Order member	Community of Interbeing (Interbeing Sangha)	Cambridge	England
Joseph Goldstein	<i>Vipassana</i> meditation teacher	Insight Meditation Society	Barre, Massachusetts	USA
Kalyanavaca	<i>Dharmacarini Anagarika</i> and Order member	Triratna Buddhist Community	London Buddhist Centre, London	England
Thanissara (LM Weinberg)	<i>Dhamma</i> teacher	Sacred Mountain Sangha (also Dharmagiri)	Sebastopol, California (also Underberg)	USA (also South Africa)
Respondents not using the MMS in teaching				
Reverend Favian	Prior	Order of Buddhist Contemplatives	Portobello Buddhist Priory, Portobello	Scotland
Jack Kornfield	<i>Vipassana</i> meditation teacher	Spirit Rock Meditation Center	Woodacre, California	USA

7.2 Overview of usage

Review of descriptions of MMS usage revealed three main areas: chanting or reading, teaching directly, and teaching indirectly. These are summarised in Table 5.

Three respondents indicated they and their community chant the MMS, and a fourth noted reading it (aloud). Although questions did not explore frequency, some responses indicated regular use: ‘we chant it in Pāli a lot, actually. It’s one of the main *paritta* chants that we do quite regularly’ (Candasiri); and Adkins indicated chanting ‘quite regularly’ at *pūjās* and ‘on a retreat or a period of practice’. Corke referred to reading it every couple of months in his local group, remarking that ‘most of our local sanghas are very familiar with it’ and that it is placed second in the Plum Village chanting book, after the *Discourse on Love (Metta Sutta)*. Adkins and Candasiri specifically named *paritta* or *mahā-pirit* uses and chanting in Pāli, Thanissara reported chanting it alongside other *parittas* when beginning retreats, and Corke made no mention of *paritta* usage or Pāli.

Two respondents spoke of direct teaching of the MMS, the Samatha Trust’s use being the most intensive. Adkins described using the *sutta* as a focus for *Dhamma* investigation, or *dharmavicaya*, in which a group focuses on a topic, for example the MMS:

looking at that in relationship to what it says about practice, what it says about how to have good fortune, how to bring about good fortune...So actually investigating it and sharing those experiences in relationship to the guidance and the advice that's been given in the *sutta*... And very often, there'll be really quite creative responses to that.

Kalyanavaca described the MMS as part of a year-three module in Triratna’s *Mitra* Study Course. The MMS is one of a number of *suttas* studied. Students complete an end-of-module project and could focus on the MMS, though Kalyanavaca was unaware of any students who had done so.

Notably missing was commentarial-style teaching. No respondent indicated teaching in this way, although Goldstein identified that potential: ‘If for example, a *Dhamma* talk went through each stanza, you could get many more than one talk out of this’.

Table 5. Uses of the MMS by interview respondents

Respondent	Community	Chant or read (when teaching)	Teach directly	Teach partially or indirectly
Rob Adkins	Samatha Trust	Chant in Pāli at <i>pūjā</i> , at special times, and as <i>maha-pirit</i> .	Yes, though not regularly; can be topic for <i>Dhamma</i> investigation in groupwork.	No
Leigh Brasington	None	No	No	No
Ajahn Candasiri	Forest Sangha	Chant as a <i>paritta</i> and in English and Pāli.	No	'I emphasise a lot of the aspects of the <i>sutta</i> in the teaching, but I don't necessarily refer them directly to the <i>sutta</i> '; used 'as a background' for retreat.
Murray Corke	Community of Interbeing	Read in English, 'probably once every couple of months' and on retreat.	No	'I'm not directly talking about the Discourse'; 'It is...something that I go to frequently.'
Joseph Goldstein	IMS	No	No	'I might well bring it in or read part of it.'
Kalyanavaca	Triratna Buddhist Community	No	Not a major text, but used in <i>Mitra</i> Study Course.	No
Thanissara	Sacred Mountain Sangha (also Dharmagiri)	Chant in Pāli and English	Not systematically	'...will draw from some of the stanzas.'

Four respondents described teaching the *sutta* indirectly, whether teaching general principles from it, using it as a background for long periods of practice, or teaching specific excerpts. One frequently-mentioned approach was extracting key messages from MSS, though *not* in the context of teaching the overall *sutta*. Goldstein and Thanissara spoke of teaching 'general principles' with no direct reference to the MMS or its specific lines or verses. Corke, whose tradition uses the name '*Discourse on Happiness*' for the MMS, described an approach that appeared more connected with the MMS: 'I'm not directly talking about the *Discourse on Happiness*, but I'm taking the insights that are there as the basis for what I'm talking about', this being in the context

of actively holding the MMS in general awareness: 'I think on pretty much every retreat that I'm involved in facilitating, we certainly will read the *Discourse on Happiness* at the end of a meditation with the whole community. So it is very present in what we're doing'. Candasiri's use was the most strongly linked to the *sutta*:

I also refer to individual verses, particularly the '*Phuṭṭhassa loka dhammehi, cittaṃ yassa na kampati*' – that one I'm always talking about. And I do also emphasise the importance of good friends... the company we keep. So that's the first one: seeking companionship with the wise and not with foolish people... It's a question that often comes up on retreats and things when people begin to realise that their values are changing, and how with the people that they used to hang out with, they're no longer interested in what they're interested in.

Sitting between direct and indirect use was Candasiri's usage of the MMS as a focus for a weekend retreat, bringing in specific lines of the *sutta*, but without teaching it fully. She commented, 'I'm very interested in people knowing what brings joy and what undermines it, and the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* seemed a very useful focus for that'.

7.3 Aspects of the MMS most interesting to respondents

One interview question explored what aspects of the MMS the respondent found most interesting. Responses are summarised in Table 6, and those mentioned by more than a single interviewee are discussed below.

Mentioned by five people was the MMS providing a highly useful summary of the path: 'a beautiful condensation' (Goldstein); 'it covers the whole of the spiritual life' (Kalyanavaca); and 'it's clearly a graduated path, so each aspect is important' (Thanissara). Ajahn Candasiri described how it 'starts with very, very basic things and leads to the most profound understanding. And it just covers everything in terms of living one's life'.

A 'most interesting' aspect mentioned by three respondents was the *sutta*'s usefulness for reviewing one's practice: 'it highlights the work that still needs to be done' (Goldstein); 'a brilliant list of things to check in about' (Brasington). Corke spoke of this indirectly in terms of process-orientation, with happiness being an 'emergent property' nourished 'indirectly by working on things like stability, calmness, generosity'.

Table 6. Aspects of the MMS noted as interesting by interview respondents

Number of respondents mentioning	Aspect of the MMS	Indicative responses
5	Useful condensation or summary of the path of practice.	'It covers the whole of the spiritual life, really. It even goes up to enlightenment' (Kalyanavaca); '...it doesn't end with <i>nibbāna</i> ...' (Thanissara).
3	List of things to cultivate or check in about.	'...a brilliant list of things to check in about' (Brasington); '...highlights the work that still needs to be done' (Goldstein).
3	Practicality of the teaching	'It spans from the practical, everyday behaviour... through to the most sublime, but also gives practical encouragement' (Thanissara).
3	Inclusion of laity	'discuss the <i>dhamma</i> ... implies to me that there is a connection between the lay followers and the monastic followers' (Kalyanavaca).
2	Seeming simplicity	'...its seeming simplicity... what this has to say about cause and effect, it is as profound as it comes' (Adkins).
2	Particular lines from the MMS – <i>Phuṭṭhassa loka dhammehi cittaṃ...</i>	
1	Universality	'It's a really clear teaching for all levels of practitioners' (Kalyanavaca).
1	Offering a non-secular worldview	Illustrates 'a world-view that is different from the Western secular view' (Thanissara).
1	Similarity to <i>Metta Sutta</i>	'...really similar kind of structure, but also very similar kinds of advice (Adkins).
1	Particular lines from the MMS – <i>Asevanā ca bālānaṃ...</i>	
1	Particular lines from the MMS – <i>pūjā ca pūjaneyyānaṃ...</i>	

Three respondents spoke to the practicality of the teachings, for example 'valuing routine, living a simple life, valuing one's parents and friends... and you know, these are all very everyday things' (Corke). Thanissara observed that the *sutta*'s practicality includes not only 'practical, everyday behaviour' but also 'through to the most sublime...encourages that it's possible to be in contact with the world, engage it without the heart being shaken or overwhelmed'.

Three respondents commented on the MMS being inclusive of laypeople. Kalyanavaca and Thanissara brought up that the emphasis on discussing *Dhamma* implies 'connection between the lay followers and the monastic followers' (Kalyanavaca). And Adkins offered that the MMS is 'as important as the *Metta Sutta*, as a central, really pithy, deep teaching, especially for laypeople'.

Two individuals spoke to the seeming simplicity of the MMS, Adkins clarifying that the MMS ‘in fact relies on very deep truths. So what this has to say about cause and effect, it is as profound as it comes...’ And Ajahn Candasiri shared her personal experience in coming to realise over time that what might appear ‘too simple, too obvious to be bothered with’ is, in fact, ‘really amazing’.

7.4 Obstacles and Challenges regarding using the MMS in the West

One interview question explored perceptions of obstacles and challenges to the use of the MMS in the West. Table 7 presents the five themes that emerged: language, people’s focus on meditation, perceived simplicity, unfamiliar concepts, and difficulty of the practice.

Table 7. Obstacles and challenges identified by respondents

Number of respondents mentioning	Obstacles and challenges to teaching the MMS to Westerners	Indicative responses
5	Linguistic challenges	(due to archaic language) ‘...they miss the deeper import of it’ (Goldstein); ‘sexist language’ (Thanissara).
4	People interested in meditation, disinterested in <i>sīla</i>	‘I think Western practitioners are more interested in learning about meditation (Kalyanavaca).
3	Perceived as too simple or not being intellectually robust	‘...it is rather suspiciously simply... people kind of want something that they regard as more intellectually robust’ (Corke).
3	Concepts unfamiliar to Westerners; rejection of the unscientific or not rational	‘a tendency in the West to feel that...you can do away with some things that the Buddha was teaching, because they are... culturally specific, or they are historically specific... there should be a core’ (Adkins).
3	Difficult path	‘It’s impacting people’s lifestyle too much and they don’t want to hear stuff like that’ (Brasington).
1	Many other texts to choose from	

Language was the most-frequently mentioned challenge, with five respondents flagging up archaic language, inaccurate translations, or lack of ‘cultural translation’. Goldstein and Corke touched on potential negative impacts of archaic or otherwise inaccessible language: ‘people just sort of bounce off’ (Corke) and can ‘miss the deeper import’ (Goldstein). Ajahn Candasiri advocated

making language relatable. Taking the word '*dhammacariya*' as an example, she explained, 'It gets translated as "giving with *Dhamma* in the heart", which it's not. It's not that at all, according to what I have found...'*dhammacariya*' is actually how you live your life according to the *Dhamma*.' She also offered 'an openness to feedback' as an alternative translation of *sovacassatā*, rather than a 'willingness to receive correction'. Thanissara raised the issue of 'cultural translation', identifying sexist language in 'cherishing wife...', and that some verses assume accessibility to living in a suitable place or having access to one's parents, which may not be possible due to systematic oppression.

Four respondents spoke of Westerners' favouring meditation and being apparently disinterested in *sīla*. Adkins, Candasiri, and Kalyanavaca all noted that people are coming to learn meditation, with Kalyanavaca specifying it is sometimes at a doctor's recommendation. Ajahn Candasiri expressed 'a sort of sense of actually many people aren't particularly interested in *sīla*', while Kalyanavaca noted that in the case of people coming for reasons such as pain management, 'there's no ethical basis for it'.

Candasiri, and Corke pointed to the simplicity of the MMS and Westerners' preference for more advanced teachings. For some, 'they want to find out about their *jhānas* and they want to know what this Dependent Origination stuff is about' (Brasington). Corke commented, 'I suspect some people want something they regard as more intellectually robust'.

Three interviewees spoke to the reluctance of some Westerners to engage with unfamiliar concepts or those not perceived to be grounded in science and rationality. *Devas*, rebirth, and making merit were mentioned specifically. Goldstein advised 'some of those concepts really need unpacking'. Adkins cautioned against a 'tendency in the West to feel that... you can do away with some things that the Buddha was teaching, because they are... culturally specific, or they are historically specific...' Continuing, he spoke to what is lost when Westerners '...do away with what they might call the *maṅgalas*, the rather magical quality of higher realms. And I think they're vital. It won't work without it. And they will go a very dry, very dreary, very hard-edged... path'.

Another challenge identified by three respondents was the difficulty of the Buddhist path of practice. Kalyanavaca offered her observation, based on decades of teaching, that people see 'it's a challenging path. And what are they interested in? They're more interested in materialism'. Brasington also brought up lifestyle, saying the MMS is 'impacting people's lifestyle too much and they don't want to hear stuff like that'. He further added that the response of Western teachers is often 'to teach what people want to hear rather than what they need to hear'. Corke's comments took a long-term perspective: 'This is a lifetime's practice. It actually requires constant effort... to be able to continue to cultivate happiness in the face of difficulties is very much what our practice is about'.

7.5 Opportunities

In discussing obstacles and challenges, direct and indirect opportunities arose quite naturally during interviews. As important contributions, these were coded, grouped, summarised, and are presented in Table 8 beside their corresponding obstacle or challenge.

Table 8. Opportunities identified by interview respondents

Obstacles and challenges in teaching the MMS to Westerners	Opportunities identified, directly (D) or indirectly (I)	Summary
Linguistic challenges	(D) (In translation, create) ‘...something that people can relate to, that’s not too other-worldly, or superstitious’ (Candasiri); (D) Develop a ‘cultural translation’ (Thanissara).	Opportunity 1: Create new translations to address linguistic challenges.
People interested in meditation, disinterested in <i>sīla</i>	(D) View <i>sīla</i> as ‘a very natural, experiential way of working that's based on mindfulness... not an imposed system of ethics’ (Corke); (I) ‘You can’t do <i>jhānas</i> if you don’t have a good foundation of <i>sīla</i> ’ (Brasington).	Opportunity 2: Foster understanding of <i>sīla</i> ’s importance and interconnectedness with <i>samādhi</i> and <i>pañña</i> .
Perceived as too simple or not being intellectually robust	(D) ‘it’s basic, it’s fundamental, it’s not rocket science - and it’s really, really worth paying attention to!’ (Candasiri); (I) ‘Just because something is simple doesn’t mean it’s easy’ (Corke).	Opportunity 3: Convey that ‘simple’ does not mean ‘easy’ and is worth paying attention to.
Concepts unfamiliar to Westerners; rejection of the unscientific or not rational	(D) ‘There's something that can be animated and integrated into the path of the Buddha...needs to be animated just as much as it did in the East’ (Adkins); (D) Foster humility, ‘acknowledging that there are many things beyond our current range of understanding’ (Goldstein).	Opportunity 4: Encourage openness regarding the unfamiliar.
Difficult path	(D) ‘Made a huge difference to me...emphasise my own experience and encourage people to try it for themselves’ (Corke).	Opportunity 5: Encourage diligence and emphasise benefits of the path.

The first opportunity identified was creating accessible translations to overcome linguistic or cultural challenges. Four interviewees mentioned this.

Ajahn Candasiri, who has translated parts of the MMS, spoke of the importance of using ‘...something that people can relate to, that’s not too other-worldly, or superstitious’. She gave the example of the passage ‘residing in a suitable place, merit done in the past’, explaining,

What I came to is...tasting the blessings from past good deeds... getting away from the sort of “merit” thing, but just more recognising that if you do something good, that you’re allowed to enjoy the good feeling that comes from that. And that nourishes you, that lifts you up, that supports you.

Making texts accessible was something Thich Nhat Hanh also did in his work translating texts for the Interbeing Sangha. Corke affirmed that Thich Nhat Hanh’s translation of ‘*maṅgala*’ as ‘happiness’ rather than a more traditional or literal translation ‘probably makes it more accessible to many of us’. And Thanissara pointed to the opportunity of creating a ‘cultural translation’. And this might incorporate non-verbal elements. In discussing groupwork with the MMS, Adkins referred to the ‘gate-keeping qualities that can come in when we’re using language’ and therefore utilising ‘more creative means that maybe bypass some of those gate-keeping qualities’. Examples included images, objects, or other ‘material representation of what it (the MMS) is and saying something about it’.

The second opportunity identified was fostering understanding of *sīla*’s importance and its interconnectedness with *samādhi* and *pañña*. Candasiri described *sīla* as a ‘basic foundation for anything else one might expect from the practice’. And Corke identified an opportunity in rethinking how we conceptualise *sīla*, understanding it not as ‘an imposed system of ethics, but really a very natural, experiential way of working that’s based on mindfulness of our interactions in life’. Adkins, Brasington, Corke and Goldstein all remarked on the interconnectedness of *sīla-samādhi-pañña* (*śmirti-samādhi-pañña* in the Interbeing Sangha). Adkins explained, ‘I wouldn’t disassociate either *samatha* or *vipassana* practices from *sīla*... *samādhi* develops *sīla* as well as developing *pañña*. I think it kind of works every which way’. Brasington’s statement, ‘you can’t do *jhānas* if you don’t have a good foundation of *sīla*’, similarly connected *sīla* with *samādhi*, strongly implying an opportunity to raise the profile of *sīla* in Western practice, an idea he later returned to:

‘I think *sīla* is given very, very low priority in Western teaching... And I have actually talked with other teachers who basically are saying the same thing - that *sīla* is simply not being addressed like it should be addressed in the West’.

The third opportunity identified was conveying that ‘simple’ does not mean ‘easy’ and is worthy of attention. Overall, the sense was one of the MMS being deceptively simple, that in truth it is ‘a central, really pithy, deep teaching, especially for laypeople’ (Adkins) and that ‘just because something is simple doesn’t mean it’s easy’ (Corke). Candasiri beautifully described her process of coming, over time, to realise this in her recollection of her own path of practice:

When I first came across Buddhist teaching, I wanted to get to the advanced stuff.

Emptiness, and these kinds of things. And I didn’t want to be bothered with being told that I

had to be responsible in daily life, or whatever. It was a kind of resistance, basically. For myself, I find that with a lot of the Buddha's teachings – it seems too simple, too obvious to be bothered with. 'Oh yes, I know that' and then you move on to the next thing. It took me a long time to get humble enough to actually really see that, hey, this is really amazing. This is really, really important stuff. And ok, it's obvious, ok, it's basic, it's fundamental, it's not rocket science - and it's really, really worth paying attention to!

The fourth opportunity described was encouraging an openness regarding what is unfamiliar. Goldstein offered as a challenge and opportunity 'opening people's minds to possibilities that are outside their own worldview' as 'a beautiful challenge for teachers'. Connected to this was the idea of encouraging humility: 'there's a little bit of humility in realising we don't know everything'. And Adkins spoke of the importance of awakening 'the faith or devotional aspects', illustrating this by his own powerful experiences relative to the MMS:

...there was that profound rhythm of the words, there was the beautiful elaboration of the repeating refrain that comes along with each verse, that actually has a bodily effect, has an effect on the heart and the body... and then understanding.

The final opportunity described was that of encouraging direct investigation into the benefits of a path that can, admittedly, be quite difficult. Corke noted the opportunity to do so, not shying away from the fact that 'this is a lifetime's practice. It actually requires constant effort.' He explained that the MMS 'made a huge difference to me and I think can make a huge difference to other people. And that's very much the perspective that I tend to take when I'm teaching in this area, is just to emphasise my own experience and to encourage people to try it for themselves'.

7.6 Quantitative ratings

The single quantitative interview question was this: On a scale of 1-10, how useful do you think the MMS is right now in teaching Western practitioners? And how useful could it be (one is low and ten is high)? Beyond calculating simple averages, subsets were considered, organised by frequency of use and type of use. These data, presented in Table 9, are not statistically robust due to the low number of respondents, yet they convey important information about perceptions of the MMS in teaching.

Table 9. Usefulness of the MMS in teaching, on a scale of 1-10 (range of responses in parentheses)

	How useful is it (currently use)?	How useful could it be (potential use)?
All respondents (n=7)	5.00 (1.00- 8.00)	9.36 (8.00-10.00)
Subsets, sorted by 'type of use'		
Traditional (n=4)	7.25 (5.50 – 8.00)	9.25 (8.00 – 10.00)
Non-traditional (n=6)	5.67 (5.50 – 8.00)	9.50 (8.00 – 10.00)
Critical examination (n=2)	6.50 (5.50 – 7.50)	9.00 (8.00 – 10.00)
Subsets, sorted by 'frequency of use'		
Do not use the MMS in teaching (n=1)	1.00	8.50
Use the MMS a little in teaching (n=2)	2.50 (2.50– 2.50)	10.00 (10.00-10.00)
Use the MMS in teaching more than a little (n=4)	7.25 (5.50 – 8.00)	9.25 (8.00 – 10.00)

Applying the frame 'type of use', three subsets emerged. Total responses numbered twelve, as some individuals indicated multiple uses:

- traditional uses, including chanting in English or Pāli (not limited to *paritta* chanting). Current and potential uses were rated 7.25 and 9.25 by this group (n=4);
- non-traditional uses, including indirect teaching such as using the MMS as a focus for groupwork or retreats. This group (n=6) rated current and potential uses 5.67 and 9.50, respectively;
- critical examination of the text, notably critical review of translation. This group included Ajahn Candasiri and Corke (using the Interbeing Sangha's translation by Thich Nhat Hanh). This group (n=2) rated current and potential uses 6.50 and 9.00, respectively.

Applying the frame of 'frequency of use' revealed three obvious subsets:

- no teaching of the *sutta*. This included Brasington, whose ratings were 1.00 and 8.50 for current and potential use;
- those who use the MMS a little in their teaching. This included Goldstein and Kalyanavaca, whose average ratings of current and potential use of the MMS were 2.50 and 10.00;
- those who use the MMS more than a little in their teaching. All other respondents were in this group, though there was considerable variation in usage. Corke noted that the MMS 'is very central to what we're doing within the COI', while Ajahn Candasiri, noting that the MMS is chanted regularly, added, 'I've never heard a talk about it directly in our monastic community'. Average ratings in this group (n=4) for current and potential use were 7.25 and 9.25.

Table 9 data reveal three interesting findings. First, every group and subset, without exception, rated the potential usefulness of the MMS very high (averages ≥ 9.00), with an average of 9.36 and a range of 8.00-10.00. Second, type of use did not appear to impact ratings substantially. Third, rating of current usefulness rose with actual use. This might be argued as expected, as a teacher would not teach what is not useful, yet it is nonetheless important that the data verified that teachers are finding real value in using the MMS.

Chapter 8: Summary, Discussion and Conclusions

8.1 Summary

The stated purpose of this dissertation was to provide greater understanding of the MMS through investigating the text, its historical and current contexts and uses, as well as obstacles to and opportunities for greater integration into Western Buddhist practice.

Close examination of the text relied on characteristics used to identify EBTs as described by four sources. The conclusion was that the MMS verses likely originated from within the Buddha's lifetime, with the prose introduction and perhaps the first verse later additions.

The long history of utilising the MMS for edification and devotional practices was reviewed. A sensitivity to these uses was found over time and space, in the Tibetan transmission and less strongly in the Chinese transmission. Those transmissions shared core messages with the Pāli recension while also providing evidence of natural variability in transmission.

'Improvisational hermeneutics' and its four loci (author's intention, text, interpreter, and interpretive communities) were explored and related to the MMS. Seven drumbeats, or recurring themes, of the earliest Buddhist teachings were identified, challenges of translation noted, and existing interpretations of the MMS as a whole reviewed. Interpretive communities were identified, with broad discussion of how the MMS is used in the East and the West.

Interviews with seven senior Western teachers generated a wealth of information on key aspects of the MMS as well as challenges, obstacles, and opportunities in offering the *sutta* to Westerners. Interviewees' average ratings of usefulness of the MMS for teaching Westerners were 5.00 for current use and 9.36 for potential use (out of a maximum of 10.00).

8.2 Discussion

A fruitful area for discussion is the intersection of the four loci of improvisational hermeneutics and the five opportunities identified by respondents in section 7.5. While all loci relate to all opportunities in some way, the clearest, strongest links are discussed here.

The first locus (author's intention), which was described in terms of seven themes of early teachings, is related to Opportunity 3 (conveying that 'simple' does not mean 'easy' and is worthy of attention). Deeply understanding the MMS can reveal that what it has 'to say about cause and effect, it is as profound as it comes, really...' (Adkins). And developing that deep understanding relies on engaging with the themes of training, developing wholesome qualities, self-reliance and rational inquiry.

The first locus, as the overarching intention of the Buddha of offering a path of practice leading to full awakening, is inter-related with Opportunity 2 (fostering understanding of *sīla*'s importance and interconnectedness with *samādhi* and *pañña*). The MMS devotes considerable attention to *sīla* practices in describing a full path of practice 'up to enlightenment' (Kalyanavaca),

This is not coincidence. Several teachers identified the foundational role of *sīla*, and *jhāna* teacher Brasington expressed this interconnection with absolute clarity: ‘You can’t do *jhānas* if you don’t have a good foundation of *sīla*’. Elsewhere he has further linked *jhānas*, closely connected with *samādhi*, to *pañña* (insight) and liberation, describing *jhāna* practice as ‘a very useful way of preparing your mind, so you can more effectively examine reality and discover the deeper truths that lead to liberation’ (Brasington, 2015: 6).

Opportunity 2 (fostering understanding of *sīla*) is also related to the second locus (the text). The MMS is an immensely useful text for illustrating the foundational role of *sīla* and its interconnectedness with *samādhi* and *pañña* (see U Ba Than’s schema, Table 3). In terms of cornerstone texts or practices for teaching *sīla*, all respondents referred to using the precepts or mindfulness trainings, with the *Sigālovada Sutta* (DN.III.180) and *Abhisanda-sutta* (AN.IV.245) also noted. The MMS was not mentioned, apart from Adkins’ explanation of making use of ‘that fundamental truth about actions having effects’ found ‘throughout the *Maṅgala Sutta*’. Yet aspects of the MMS that respondents identified as most interesting to them are indicative of the usefulness of the MMS for Western lay practitioners’ explorations of *sīla* and its interconnections with *samādhi* and *pañña*:

- a useful overview of the path;
- a useful list of things to cultivate;
- practicality of the teaching;
- inclusion of laity.

The second locus (the text) also connects strongly with Opportunity 1 (creating new translations). Language and cultures change, and creating culturally-relevant, linguistically-accessible translations enable people to better access the Buddha’s teachings in terms of both intellectual understanding and actual practice.

Related to the third locus (interpreter) is Opportunity 4 (encouraging openness regarding the unfamiliar). A key understanding here is that all practitioners are interpreters, not only scholars or monastics. Benson’s analogy of jazz music makes clear the important interpretive role of each individual. Just as a musician interprets a composition afresh with every performance or rehearsal, a practitioner interprets a teaching with every reading, chanting, or other use. Specifically addressing encouraging openness to the unfamiliar, Goldstein advised:

‘I think the particular Western slant in doing that is reiterating that there’s no demand for belief... But to acknowledge that it is actually part of the Buddha’s teachings, and so we might want to explore, acknowledging that there are many things beyond our current range of understanding. So there’s a little bit of humility in realising we don’t know everything’.

Opportunity 5 (encouraging investigation into the benefits of the admittedly difficult path) relates primarily to the fourth locus (interpretive communities). Senior community members are influential voices of experience, able to offer information, encouragement, and inspiration. Those who have walked the path of practice are uniquely placed to share the truths of its challenges and its fruits.

Moreover, communities filter which teachings are frequently used; a community can raise the profile of a text or bury it. A key challenge for interpretive communities is, in a culture ‘interested in materialism’ (Kalyanavaca), to avoid the tendency ‘to teach what people want to hear rather than what they need to hear’ (Brasington). This is echoed in Bhikkhu Bodhi’s (2006: 4) exhortation, ‘the Sangha’s crucial mission is *not only to meet challenges but to offer challenges*’ (original italics).

8.3 Conclusions

Some Western Buddhist communities are already using the MMS for education, devotional practice, or both. Yet in the main, though recognised as highly useful by those familiar with it, the MMS remains under-utilised in Western Buddhism. It is not often taught directly or fully. An important challenge and opportunity is making it more accessible to and for Westerners, most of whom live embedded in materialistic economic systems that seemingly are in tension with the practice of *sīla*.

Thus an area for further investigation is exploring ways *sīla* practice can be framed for effectively teaching Westerners, whether adults or children. This might include frames that address *sīla* on its own, *sīla* and meditation, or the interconnections of *sīla-samādhi-pañña*. The MMS, with its thirty-eight *maṅgalas* reflecting aspects of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *pañña*, could be an excellent resource for any of these frames. By linking the MMS (and other teachings) with topics the *are* of keen interest to Westerners, topics like the science of happiness or neuroscience, the potential is there to awaken interest in *sīla*. For example, the thirty-eight *maṅgalas* map rather well onto Seligman’s five elements of well-being: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (Seligman, 2011: 24). Additionally, of interest would be a study of the Buddha’s direct teachings on prosperity in the material world, in the context of *sīla* practice.

Linguistically, further research could include translation of the Chinese Taishō *JíXiáng Pīn*, updating Beal’s 1901 work. And direct translations of the Tibetan would eliminate doubt as to the accuracy of Feer’s translations. Finally, investigation into early words, word forms, or grammatical structure of the MMS could lend more weight to the preponderance of evidence for its assessment as early. Excellent resources detailing linguistic clues can be found in Geiger (1943), Norman (2008), and Pande (2015: 56-57).

The MMS presents itself as a particularly useful and potent text for time-strapped Westerners, conveying in few words important essences of the Buddha's teachings. The improvisational hermeneutic represented in Figure 2 suggests the richest interpretive experiences of the MMS arise where all four loci are activated: author's intention, text, interpreter, and community. Educational uses of the MMS, for example, potentially rest in the intersection of all four loci. Devotional or *paritta* functions seem to rest in the intersection of three loci: text, interpreters, and traditions, though an argument might be made that all four loci apply.

Following Benson's musical analogy, the MMS is akin to a seemingly simple composition that musicians of all skill levels can play in some satisfying way. Likewise, practitioners of all levels – all of whom can and should be considered 'interpreters' - can access the MMS to good, if not great, effect. Communities of practitioners, be they formal Buddhist traditions or informal groups, have a clear and important role to play in raising the profile and use of the MMS. And some Western communities are already exploring the MMS in effective and creative ways. There is much to be gained, for the benefit of all, by Westerners expanding upon this beginning.

Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form and Invitation Letter

Invitation Letter

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
30th November, 2018

Dhamma Teachers

Dear Participant,

I am a student at the University of South Wales (Treforest Campus) undertaking a Master's degree in Buddhist Studies. As part of my final year research project, An Exploration of the *Maṅgala Sutta*: Content and Context, I am investigating interpretations and use of the *Maṅgala Sutta* in current teaching (of lay practitioners as well as monastics) and the *sutta*'s potential for greater use.

In order to carry out this dissertation, I need participants to engage in one-to-one recorded interviews with me, Claralynn Nunamaker, within a mutually agreeable and appropriately private setting. The interview will be based on a fixed set of ten questions and will be by **Skype, Zoom** or by **telephone**. If this is not possible, email responses to the same fixed set of ten questions can be substituted. Any data gathered will be treated confidentially and securely stored.

I would like to invite your participation in this study, which is hoped will be interesting, informative, and useful. I will circulate a draft copy of relevant parts of the dissertation for your review on or before 31 Dec 2018. You will be invited to request appropriate alterations or deletions, for example to protect sensitive information, and these will be incorporated in the final dissertation. If you are interested, I will happily share the dissertation with you.

I would be grateful if you could respond via email to: karmacanyon@gmail.com, or 14100215@students.southwales.co.uk, or telephone: 01873880029. Please find enclosed/attached, the Consent Form to be returned to the above address (or completed, scanned and emailed).

Thanking you in advance,

Yours faithfully,

Claralynn Nunamaker

Consent Form

I have read and understood the letter regarding Claralynn Nunamaker's final year dissertation research project.

I understand that the anonymity of all participants, including myself, will be ensured and that all information will be treated confidentially.

I agree that the researcher, Claralynn Nunamaker, can record the interviews including, my responses, and that these will become part of the research project.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions regarding this project.

I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time.

I agree to participate in this study.

Interviewee

Printed Name: -----

Signature: ----- Date: -----

Researcher:

Printed Name: -----

Signature: ----- Date: -----

Please complete and return electronically (completed, scanned & emailed) to karmacanyon@gmail.com or 14100215@students.southwales.co.uk

Or post to
C Nunamaker

████████████████████

██████████

████████████████

██████████

United Kingdom

Thank you very much.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How do you currently engage with the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* (MMS)? (E.g., read, chant, teach occasionally, teach regularly, translate, etc.).
2. Do you use the MMS in your own teaching? If yes, how and how often?
3. What aspect(s) of the MMS do you find most interesting, relative to your own practice and/or teaching?
4. Thinking of the framework of *sīla-samādhi-pañña*, how do you balance your own teaching?
5. In what ways do you currently teach *sīla* practice? Do you use ‘cornerstone’ practices or texts?
6. In terms of teaching practitioners (monastics or laity), how would you describe current use of the MMS in the East? In the West?
7. In a conversation (on Vimeo) with Venerable Anālayo, Professor Hallisey of the Harvard Divinity School said, ‘...the *Maṅgala Sutta* is not taken seriously by academic Buddhists...but I think it is one of the most important texts that we have.’ Do you agree? Do you think it is similarly overlooked by Buddhist practitioners and their teachers? If yes, why do you think it is overlooked?
8. What obstacles or challenges do you see to the MMS being taught more to Western practitioners?
9. On a scale of 1-10, how useful do you think the MMS is right now in teaching Western practitioners? And how useful could it be (on a scale of 1-10)?
10. Is there anything you’d like to add?

Appendix C: Interviews with Teachers

Interview 1. Rob Adkins

Dhamma Teacher, Samatha Trust

Manchester

and Claralynn Nunamaker, University of South Wales student, MA Buddhist Studies

Llanover, Wales

Skype call (recorded), 60 minutes

Date: 22-11-18

CN: The first question is quite straightforward, and it is: How do you currently engage with the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta*? And here I have in mind reading, chanting, teaching, chant, teach occasionally, translating...

RA: Ok. I'll tell you when I first came across it, which is interesting in itself. Because I remember - and this is certainly more than thirty years ago, thirty-four, thirty-five years ago - I was going to meditation classes, Samatha breathing, mindfulness classes in Manchester. And there were weekly or monthly *pūjās*. And at the *pūjā* there would be a range of chants that were chanted in Pāli. And the styles of chanting that were chanted there covered quite a broad spectrum, I know now. At the time, it was just chanting, beautiful and moving and stirring. And I at the time, although I knew what some of it meant, at the time I didn't know, for example, what the *Mahā-Maṅgala* or the *Maṅgala Sutta* meant, in Pāli. And at that time there were a number of Sri Lankan people who were joining in what was a Western lay Buddhist meditation tradition. But they would come along to the *pūjās*, because they were using the centre as a place where they would bring children and do some sorts of cultural stuff from time to time. And I can remember the distinct style, the way in which the Sri Lankans chanted it. Because there was a tone quality in the way in which the women, when - you know the repeating refrain at the end of the verses?

CN: Mmm... *etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ*.

RA: The people going (*chanting*) '*etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ*', that would be the main body. But the women had a way of - I don't know what it was - decorating that, some kind of overtone, that I couldn't describe musically but could feel the effect of. And it always made it, gave it a particular kind of energy but also a particular kind of elaboration that was not only stirring but also very beautiful. And so encountering it like that for the first time was very lovely because when I do do it, there's a kind of resonance with those early experiences. And it's simply being chanted in a very devotional context.

And I can remember when Sarah - who was my first teacher all those years ago - I can remember saying to her I was very interested in the meditation, which I'd been doing previously, but I wasn't really sure about all the emotional stuff, all the Buddha *rupas* and this and that. And I remember her saying at the time that, 'Well, just you wait and see'. And part of that kind of awakening of the *saddha*, the faith or the devotional aspects of the Buddhist teaching certainly was awakened by things like the Pāli chanting and certainly was... awakened by that. You know, because of the quality of the feeling, even without understanding it.

So where I'm currently engaged with it? Well, I still chant it quite regularly. This would be at the *pūjās*. But also it comes into the *maha-pirits* and things like that. So when there are occasions where there's been all-night chanting at particular festivities or something, like the Sri Lankans would do, also chant it (*poor recording quality, lost words*) sangha. Chant it before, say, a retreat or a period of practice - a weekend, a week, or longer period, then invariably in the evening and/ or mornings, there'll be periods of time when people are chanting. And that, the *Maṅgala Sutta*, will come up with reasonable regularity. So people generally are very familiar with it. I haven't made an effort to learn it by heart in the way which I have with the *Metta Sutta*, for example, which I know by heart in Pāli. But I suspect I could probably do it by heart, and I don't really look at the (*poor recording quality, lost word*) text.

So what else? Read it. I've read translations of it and chant it, obviously, from time to time. Teach? Well, I teach a meditation group weekly in a nearby (*poor recording quality, lost word*). In that context, what we would do, is we will have a topic that we're looking at in terms of theory or *Dhamma* investigation of one kind or another. And the *Maṅgala Sutta* has been one of those. So looking at that in relationship to what it says about practice, what it says about how to have good fortune, how to bring about good fortune, which ultimately is *nibbāna*, of course. So as you say, it goes all the way. It goes all the way from not associating with fools, turning away from something, to complete freedom. And stages in between. So I wouldn't say I teach it regularly. It comes up from time to time. Translate it, no, I haven't translated it.

It's very, very early, isn't it? What struck me in looking at this is the number of similarities there are with the *Metta Sutta*. The *Metta Sutta* also gives a path. If you want freedom, this is what a meditator should do. If you want to go in that direction, this is what you should do.

CN: Mmm.

RA: That's a really similar kind of structure, but also very similar kinds of advice about how to do it. Just looking at it before this conversation, I was really struck by the similarity. And of course they come from that group of very ancient texts, don't they? The most ancient sort of record of the Buddha's teaching.

CN: Well, that's right, and in those very ancient ones, you don't get - for example Gil Fronsdal in talking about the authenticity of the *Atthaka-vagga* as very early - he says that one of the things you don't get is numbered teachings. You know, one, two, three, four, five... right? But another thing is that you don't get any reference to settled monastic life. You get a reference to an individual sage, right? So in the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta*, for example, it's talking about hearing the *Dhamma* and talking about the *Dhamma* with a *samaṇa*.

RA: Ah, ok, so it's a *samanera*. So when it speaks about seeing monks - because obviously I 'm working with translation here - so when it says hearing *Dhamma* at the right time, seeing monks is another one, isn't it? Seeing *samaneras* is another one of the *maṅgalas*, isn't it?

CN: Yes - I'd have to look back to see if it's singular or plural.

RA: Yes, it's interesting. I understand what you're saying.

CN: And the other thing in the very, very early texts is that you don't get names for doctrines. You get practices, you get 'this is what you do', not 'this is what we *call* what you do'. So it's focused on *content* rather than focused on *framework*. I mean, the framework is there, you can see it, you can superimpose it, but that's not how it's presented.

RA: Very direct. Very direct and experiential, rather than slightly abstract and with a reflecting quality, so it seems.

[10:00-10:33 Digression about dating the *sutta*.]

CN: The early texts kind of have a similar flavour. Sujato and Brahmali talk about the sense of a single creator. And you're seeing that with overlap of the style of the *Metta* and the *Mahā-Maṅgala Suttas*.

RA: Yes, yes.

CN: So - it's fascinating stuff.

RA: Yes, yes.

CN: So, number one feels complete. The second one is if you use the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta*, in your own teaching and, if you do, how do you use it and how often? You've talked about that a little bit with it being part of the group of chants.

RA: So just looking at it in terms of what does it mean, how does one relate to it in experience? So in experience, what does it mean to turn away from fools? To turn away - what is that? So actually applying it. And what's the effect of doing that in one's personal experience of actually - what is a fool? When are the instances of when one's turned away from that kind of (*poor recording quality, lost words*). So actually investigating it and sharing those experiences in relationship to the guidance and the advice that's been given in the *sutta*.

CN: So let me just reflect it to see if I've got the understanding right. That you're doing that internal investigation - what does it mean, how does it feel when I'm turning away from the

unwise and towards the wise. And then using that sort of experiential sense of it.

RA: Mmm. In groupwork. So there is the issue of working in groups. Whereby what people do is look at an aspect of *Dhamma* teaching. So in this case it would be looking at what it means not to associate with fools.

CN: Ok.

RA: And the individuals in the group would be given that task over a week, and to find examples in their own life. When they've done it - because we do it, quite probably we do it daily. It could be moving away from the television. You know? It could be saying, 'I'm not gonna read that in the newspaper today, because it doesn't do me no good.' Do you know what I mean? It's as practical and as experiential as that, yeah? So what is your experience, and then to reflect on it, and then to come back the week after and then say, Well what did you find out? What was your experience? How does that relate to your experience during the week, or your recollection of significant moments that have occurred in your life when that's happened, or you've seen that happen and you've turned away from it. You saw a fool, or... Do you see what I'm getting at?

CN: Absolutely. So quite rich material for discussion, for internal reflection and then discussion afterwards. But the key is that people are doing this themselves, that you're kind of setting up the experiment, and then they run it.

RA: Yes, yes. And very often, there'll be really quite creative responses to that. So people are encouraged not to simply use words, but to either use images or to use all sorts of things - making objects, just giving some kind of material representation of what it is and saying something about it. So it's not simply using language to recollect and to express what it is they've found, but also using more creative means that maybe bypass some of those gate-keeping qualities that can come in when we're using language, yeah?

CN: Yes. So it's an open invitation to express what's coming up, however it wants to be expressed.

RA: Well, that sounds a bit undisciplined. Because the discipline of the group is arranged in a way that holds something. So it's not a sort of free-form thing. Although they're free to do whatever they want. So somebody might, for example, have written a story about what's happened, or they might present a picture of something where there's some imagery that they're sharing. Does that make sense?

CN: Yes. So it's an invitation to bring in different... forms of communication that go beyond simply the verbal.

RA: Yes- audio, to use verbal if you wish, but there's an encouragement to do other things. Because it's so habitual with just chatting.

CN: So when you do that, when you make that invitation to explore over the next week, are you looking at one verse, or a single *maṅgala*? How do you decide what the parameters are that you set up in a given week?

RA: It would be... I think that one, where it says 'not associating with fools, associating with the wise'... it would depend on the group, really. But if it's 'not associating with fools', that feels quite big to me. And in a way, to keep it just like that. Or it might work with the two, do you know what I mean? So it would depend upon what felt right.

CN: Yes, there's a fluidity to it.

RA: So it's not like a rigid curriculum. Because the text itself, in a way, is providing a way of flowing through. And sometimes it might be that you might use two, or it might be...

'Living in a suitable place' what does that mean? That's quite a big thing. That's a huge thing, that, isn't it? 'Living in a suitable place'.

CN: Yes. So what I'm hearing there is you're looking at the context that you're operating in and what's the right amount for people to be considering over the next week. So it's not a set, one *maṅgala* or three *maṅgalas* - it's what your sense is right for the group.

RA: Yes. And then the group may well have some input into that. To say, well we could do these two, or we could do this one. There would be a certain amount of negotiation that went on in relationship to what feels the right thing to do, or that feels too much, when deciding that kind of thing.

CN: Mmm. It sounds like a really, really rich practice.

RA: Yes, yes, yes. Well, I mean, it's here, isn't it? (*Pointing to the text of the Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta*).

CN: Yes, it is. So does that feel complete for you, Question 2, talking about how you teach it? Or are there other aspects that you want to bring in?

RA: Only one other thing. And that is I know that some groups, when they've done this - the groups I've worked with haven't done this - but sometimes groups will kind of make some sort of material manifestation of what they've studied, of what they've done? So, for example, I know with the *Maṅgala Sutta*, at one of the meditation centres there are whole series of pictures, and there are pictures of each one of the aspects of the *Maṅgala Sutta*? I know that a friend, I think it was Rosemary, said many years ago now, that in working with her group, I think probably in Bakewell, that they produced these. And some of those have been - I think it's right to say - that they're in different mediums. Some are in paint, some are in inkwash, I think there even one that might be embroidered. So they are a series of pictures. So what's happened is that, having done that work, they then made some kind of product or artistic representation of some kind. Sometimes these things have been books or they've been collections of contributions of various kinds. But it kind of brings (*poor recording quality, lost word*) to completion, it brings the investigation to a kind of publication, I suppose, a kind of sharing, sharing of those things so that these pictures have been from time to time, around.

CN: And from when you would start with the reflection on the first *maṅgala*, or *maṅgalas*, to completion through the end, what sort of rough timeframe would you expect that to be?

RA: I can't...

CN: I know it will vary.

RA: ...I can't speak to that one, because I wasn't involved with it. If you want, you could perhaps talk with Rosemary. I'm sure she'd be happy to talk to you about it. But other ones that I have been involved in - for example, do you know the *Lakkhana Sutta*, the *sutta* on the thirty-two marks?

CN: Mmm, oh yes.

RA: We spent, I should say, three years working on the before publication came out.

CN: Wow.

RA: So, yes. But it's a kind of completion of something. I think it's another aspect of the Dhamma investigation.

CN: So does that now feel complete for two? And then this third one, this could be quite rich with this interview. Some of the interviews this one's quite short. But it's one of my favourites. What aspect or aspects of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* do you find most interesting relative to your own practice and/or teaching?

RA: Hmm, I haven't thought about this. That's interesting. (*Considering*). I think the most interesting thing about it is its directness and its practicality. And its in a way, its seeming simplicity. So many of the Buddha's teachings, what's being said is so obvious that in fact relies on very deep truths. So what this has to say about cause and effect, it is as profound as it comes, really. If one were to truly understand, *truly* understand why this works - why human beings are like this, and why if we act in these ways, we will be fortunate, we will have good fortune, and will arrive at the ultimate good fortune - if we *truly* saw that, I think we'd get there anyway. Because it would mean that we would see something about cause and effect, dependent origination, which is about that way in which we construct self and world. Because at its deepest, that's what this is about. It really is, isn't it? So I think that probably that's the most interesting part of it, I'd say. And it really goes very, very, very deep indeed. And what could seem like a rather superstitious, and rather - you know the way which some people regard *paritta* as a kind of rather superstitious reliance upon rites and rituals...

CN: Mmm.

RA: ...in fact, although I'm sure this *can* be taken in that way, in fact it's *not*. It's nothing like that. I mean, the quality of *pīti* and of joy that arises in hearing it, really is a profound basis for *saddha*, for *Dhamma* investigation, *dhammavicaya*, in fact for the path. I mean, in a way, just like the *Metta Sutta*, all of the path is in here. So, I think - I don't think it comes much more interesting and profound than that, really.

CN: I agree with you. And I hadn't thought about putting the frame of cause and effect on this, and it completely works, doesn't it? Because you plant those good causes that he's talking about early on, and that leads to the positive effect, and it culminates in the ultimate positive effect, yeah?

RA: That's right. Yes, yes.

CN: So, another beautiful frame to put on it.

RA: Yes.

CN: And when I wrote these questions, I was thinking of a different frame, which is where this next question comes from: Thinking of the framework of *sīla-samādhi-pañña*, how do you balance your own teaching?

RA: You mean, in a meditation class?

CN: I'm not familiar enough with Samatha to know if you do much teaching outwith meditation, but I would say the teaching as a whole. And not necessarily restricted to this *sutta*.

RA: Sure, I understand. This is a really interesting question, isn't it? Because mostly, people come to a meditation class. There are people who turn up to a *pūjā* off the street and they like the chanting - it's not usual. Most people who make a contact with classes are doing so because they want to do some meditation. So they're coming at it from the middle. They're looking for *samādhi*, they're looking for meditation.

CN: That's right - and they may not even know about the other aspects.

RA: Exactly so. Exactly so. And in my experience, what happens is - I usually would not really be saying anything about *sīla* for quite a while, until something might come up, in which case I'll respond to it. But generally speaking, when people are reporting - in that relationship, which is a very important, I'd say the most important part of developing a meditation practice within this particular lineage/tradition, is that in each meditation class, people will spend twenty minutes, a quarter of an hour, half an hour, talking individually to the teacher about how their practice is going. And what tends to happen there is that people begin to realise that the *samādhi*, that the peacefulness, tranquility, mindfulness - whatever you want to call it - the developing qualities that are being brought about by the breathing practice are beginning to affect their lives.

And they're often noticing things that they don't want to do any more, or they're noticing things about people that they don't want to engage with in the same way. And that will come up. And that will come up within that one-to-one situation. Stuff will come up in the group, you know, so that people will mention that.

And that really is the point where saying something about *sīla* makes sense. Because they can see that when we don't do that, which we don't, we can see the effect it has on practice. We can see what it does. And therefore it becomes a cause and effect thing, along the lines of the *Maṅgala Sutta*, yeah? And so people, generally speaking, are coming in from the point of view that *samādhi*, (*poor recording quality, lost words*) for the practice, but they start seeing things. So they will begin to see things about, what would we say? Because they wouldn't use the term *anicca* or they wouldn't use the term 'impermanence'. But they might see something about people suffering. They might see in the supermarket that somebody is upset, or there's something about their *dukkha*. And they see

things. And of course that is extended into working with the Three Signs or whatever it might be. But it comes from that experience.

Speaking for myself - it would come from that experience rather than 'It's Week Ten, now we'll do the Five Precepts'. Although, you know, that is done. On the online course, where there's kind of quite a specific curriculum that's followed, which is very, very good, so it *does* say, 'It's Week Fifteen, and here come the Five Precepts.' And that's another way. From my point of view, people would need to be kind of ready for it.

CN: And it makes sense that there are different strategies for different contexts. So when you're with a group of people, physically with a group of people, it makes sense that things are arising organically from their experience. And you don't have the same kind of immediacy with an online group. So it makes sense to have more structure, perhaps.

RA: Exactly.

CN: Do you happen to know if the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* is included in the curriculum for the online course?

RA: Good question. I can find out.

CN: That actually would be really interesting. If you could.

RA: I'll find out. (*writing*) Well, it's written by Peter Harvey, you know, who was the Professor of Buddhist Studies...

[31:00-31:32 Digression about online MA in Buddhist Studies developed by Peter Harvey.]

CN: And then you've really addressed the next question already, which is: In what ways do you currently teach *sīla* practice? And you've just described how it grows quite naturally from the experiences of the students. And then the other part of the question would be: Are there 'cornerstone' practices or texts that you use to support that teaching of *sīla*?

RA: Cornerstone to teach *sīla*?

CN: Some people talk about using the precepts as a cornerstone. Of course I had in mind the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* when I was writing this question, and aware that there might be others.

RA: I'm just recollecting what comes up... Well, certainly the precepts. So those formulas, you know? The *manṇa makka* (sic) and so on and so forth. And that is a particular step when people want to do that, when they're happy to undertake refuges and precepts. And it's not marked by any kind of ceremony or any kind of particular external manifestation.

Some ... (*poor recording quality, lost words*) ... chant. They probably don't know what it means. On the other hand, the act of consciously doing it is a significant moment. And I suppose that text, those words, embody or in some way signify the meaning for undertaking those refuges and precepts. The only other thing is not a text, but that quality of cause and effect, that fundamental truth about actions having effects. That's throughout the *Maṅgala Sutta*, I think. But I can't think of any other cornerstone practices. You see, I wouldn't disassociate either *samatha* or *vipassana* practices from

sīla. That *samādhī* develops *sīla* as well as developing *pañña*. I think it kind of works every which way.

CN: Mmm. So as you're thinking of cause and effect, it's flowing...

RA: ...and it's when people *see* it. It's people *seeing* something about that that makes a difference. And feel it. Feeling something about that that makes a difference.

CN: Yes, and I'm really getting that that's the springboard, people's *direct* experience, rather than this set of, 'I want to present this idea in this text'. And certain ideas and texts will come in, but the driver is people's experiences, and their questions, and the things they're finding out for themselves?

RA: The text might well provide the context for that exploration of *Dhamma*, that *dhammavicaya* which is exploration of experience, isn't it? To see, is that what happens? When I'm associating with fools, or when I associate with wise people, what happens? And so that's working with a text. But also the experience of investigation of it.

CN: Yes. And I often think of the Buddha's teachings as the experimental manual that he's giving to us. And then it's up to us to run the experiments and see how they go.

RA: (*poor recording quality, lost words*)

CN: Ok, so moving on to the next question, and that is: In terms of teaching practitioners, whether monastics or lay people, how would you describe, as best you know, the current use of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* in the East? And then the second part of the question is, 'in the West?'

RA: I know that it is a much-loved *sutta* and chanted in Sri Lanka. And amongst the Sri Lankan community. And amongst Thai monks and the Thai community. I've experienced that in Thailand and in Sri Lanka, and in Thai monasteries in England with Thai and English people, and in Sri Lankan monasteries with Sri Lankan people. So I know it's much-loved. My experience is mostly with Sri Lankan people. The knowledge of some Sri Lankan lay people of *Dhamma* and so forth is very, very deep indeed. I'm very, very moved, and I was going to say surprised, at the kind of earnestness and the delight that they take in understanding *Dhamma* and investigating *Dhamma*. So I haven't had the same experience of lay people in Thailand or with Thai people. But that could just be chance. It could just be chance.

CN: Yes, and what I'm hearing with some of the practitioners in Sri Lanka in particular, it's much more than just learning the *sutta* and being able to recite it. There's a deep connection with and understanding of it that's quite profound.

RA: Even down to the very subtle qualities of the pronunciation of Pāli, the roots of the Pāli words, the relationship to meaning and to qualities of feeling arising because of the sounds of the Pāli...

CN: Wow.

RA: That's not everybody by any means. But certainly here in Manchester there are significant (*poor recording quality, lost words*) people who (*poor recording quality, lost words*) that engaged with the

teaching of the Buddha. And the *Maṅgala*, I've heard it chanted many times. I've not heard them specifically speak about the *Maṅgala Sutta*. But I'm reasonably confident that they would talk about it in the same kind of way, with the same kind of engagement and understanding.

CN: And when you say 'they' - I think I must have missed out a couple of words with buffering - who are you referring to with 'they'? Is that other Samatha teachers?

RA: Oh, no, no. The people I'm specifically talking about are Sri Lankan lay people.

In particular, Sri Lankan lay people who come along to *pūjās* and so forth at the Sri Lankan monastery in south Manchester.

CN: Mmm. Who have the deep understanding and the nuance of the words as well. And what about in the West?

RA: Well, the practice within Samatha as an association I've described. And I would say that the people are generally familiar with it and would have a love and an understanding of what it's about. And many people have engaged with it as a kind of *Dhamma* investigation. Outside of that, I don't really know about other Buddhist groups in the UK in terms of the way in which they work with chanting or with the *Maṅgala Sutta* specifically. I have been to a few things, but it wouldn't be right for me to say, really, because I don't know. Because they're not experiences. They've been at conferences and things like that.

So they've been at sessions that have been led by other groups. So I've heard the chanting done by them, sometimes in English, occasionally in Pāli, but I don't feel that I have the experience to comment on what other Western Buddhist groups are doing with it.

CN: Yes, of course. So it's mostly a question of in your own tradition and then just impressions of the others.

RA: Of the other Western ones. The Thai - I'm much more familiar with the way in which the Thai sangha and Thai lay people would engage with it, and even more so with the Sri Lankan sangha and Sri Lankan lay people.

[42:47-42:55 Digression about Sri Lankan community.]

CN: So the next question, this is an interesting one. Months ago I found an online conversation on Vimeo with the Venerable Anālayo and Professor Hallisey of the Harvard Divinity School. And I was struck by what Professor Hallisey said. And I listened to enough times to get the exact quote, and here it is: he said, '...the *Maṅgala Sutta* is not taken seriously by academic Buddhists...but I think it is one of the most important texts that we have.' So this question has three parts, and the first is simply: do you agree?

RA: I don't know how he can say that the *Maṅgala Sutta* is not taken seriously by academic Buddhists. I know two living professors of Buddhism in the UK - Rupert Gethin and Peter (Harvey) -

and I know that they take the *Maṅgala Sutta* seriously. Lance Cousins, I know he took the *Maṅgala Sutta* seriously. So I don't know why he's suggesting that academic Buddhists wouldn't take it seriously. So I can't really agree with that.

As to whether it is one of the most important texts, I think it is a very, very important text. A very, very important text. I think it's a central text. I think it's as important as the *Metta Sutta*, as a central, really pithy, deep teaching, especially for laypeople.

CN: Yes, yes. And just as an aside, this is one of the things that I find very interesting, is that this is a *sutta* that was obviously intended not just for a monastic - or for sages - but intended for the laity.

RA: Well, it grew out of an argument that human beings were having about what's lucky. You know, we want some good luck. Where do we find it? Where's some good luck?

And they have an argument, don't they? And then, is it Sakka according to the story? He says, Well, you should go and ask the Buddha. Don't ask me, go and see the Buddha about it. And so it began. It's a very human thing, isn't it? A very kind of lay human thing.

CN: Yes. So let me re-focus on the next part of this question. And I think maybe we'll do it a little differently because in your tradition, this *sutta* is used so much. The original question is: Do you think it is similarly overlooked by Buddhist practitioners and their teachers? So maybe to open that out to, to what extent you know that it is or isn't used by other traditions, in addition to how it's used in your own.

RA: That's tricky, isn't it? What I could say is this. I remember going to a really interesting talk at the Quaker Meeting House on Euston Road, and it was a presentation by Stephen Batchelor and Donald Kupitz, I don't know if you know him? A Christian theologian. A very interesting Christian theologian. But he is very much a Christian secularist. So he's come to the conclusion that in fact English literature is the best manifestation of Christian theology that there is, I think. Maybe I'm mis-stating... But Stephen Batchelor is - how to phrase this? - he's looking for a very unelaborated core of what he finds in the earliest *suttas* of the Buddha's teaching. And he seems to be busy filleting the Buddha's teaching of those aspects that are cultural or historical, in the supposed name of coming to some central core that can be verified as the real thing. That's my impression of his project. And if that is the case, and if there are *devas*, minor shining *devas*, coming along to the Buddha and lighting and radiating their glory around Jeta's Grove, I think that aspect of the *sutta* is going to be filleted.

And I think this a tendency in the West. There's a tendency in the West to feel that, Well, actually you can do away with some things that the Buddha was teaching, because they are, what they would call, culturally specific, or they are historically specific. That as a consequence, there might be a core - no, no, there should be a core somewhere, and when we get to that real core - this begins to sound like Buddhist fundamentalism - when we get to that real thing, then we'll be able to trust it. And I feel that is deeply misguided. I feel that that fillets a sense - it's exactly what I

experienced in the first encounter that I had with the *Maṅgala Sutta*, where there was that profound rhythm of the words, there was the beautiful elaboration of the repeating refrain that comes along with each verse, that actually has a bodily effect, has an effect on the heart and the body, and then understanding. So what is that? That's *samādhi*, isn't it? It's developing *pīti*, and (*poor recording quality, lost word*) all those qualities. And then the understanding that comes in, realising what it's saying.

And I think there is a tendency in the West, though I can't point to it in specifics in regard with regard to the *Maṅgala Sutta*, that there's a tendency to do away with what they might call the *maṅgalas*, the rather magical quality of higher realms. And I think they're vital. I think that the quality of the magic - our magic - (*garbled*) needs to be animated just as much as it did in the East. And not to do that - well, it won't work without it. It won't work without it. And they will go a very dry, very dreary, very hard-edged, fundamental, luckless path. So I'm not sure if that's an answer to that question or not.

CN: Well, it somewhat changes the question. Not 'Is the *Maṅgala Sutta* itself overlooked?' but more like, 'Are the facets of it that give it this richness of experience, are those facets dropped away to some reductionist, "This is the part that really matters"?'

RA: I think that may well be the case. So when people - how to express this? - when people are not helped to integrate those parts of themselves and the worlds that we create that *are* magical, that *are* higher, that *do* partake of the brilliance and radiance and the quality of other beings - and they reside in ourselves as well as in the worlds that we make - when they're denied, then they're not going to be whole people. You know, Christians should believe in angels, this is for sure. And if we can't be out in the woods and realise that there's a *deva* residing in that tree, and actually there really *is* a *deva* residing in that tree, then there's something that can be animated and integrated into the path of the Buddha that is not being (animated).

CN: And we're losing something.

RA: Yes, yes, yes. We're losing something that should be integrated.

CN: So let me slightly change the last part of that question, then. Rather than why is the *Maṅgala Sutta* overlooked, why do you think that that aspect, the more magical - that's not the word I want to use - those less tangible aspects - why do think there's this tendency to want to discount them, or not consider them?

RA: Well, academically there's a long history of this, isn't there? If you look at the research that's being done on *boran kammaṭṭhāna*, the stuff that's being done at King's College and so forth, about how the reform of the Buddha's teaching took place at the end of the nineteenth century as a result of colonialism and so forth, yeah? And the way in which a particular form of Buddhist was presented to the West that was rationalistic, that would tie in with Enlightenment views that they thought we had. And so there was a certain amount of censorship in the way in which we received

Buddhism in the West, because they didn't want it to be thought of as a kind of superstitious sort of religion.

And that research, which you must be familiar with, has gone on and is increasingly going on. So that big division took place where things like *jhāna* and those magical practices and states of profound *pīti* and so forth, were kind of hidden away and *vipassana* and the rationalistic, scientific way was fore-grounded and has been a lot more popular in the West. And I think it's probably part of that same move. Now there are all kinds of things that are changing now. Ajahn Brahm and a whole number of different people now are kind of - at that turning around again. But that's been a real move - I think part of those devotional, faith-based feeling aspects, embodied mind and so forth have been, in the West, neglected in favour, in many Western lay traditions - not all, by any means - neglected in favour of that rather more rationalist, scientific, modern form of interpretation of the Buddha's teaching.

There may be certain aspects of the *Maṅgala Sutta* would not be acceptable in that more rationalistic, scientific, modern, dare I say fundamentalist form of...

CN: Fundamentalist in a certain type of way. Because you could also argue that a Buddhist fundamentalist would argue that of course there are *devas*.

RA: Yes, yes - that's a fair point.

CN: All right. Well, that's very helpful. The next question is, I think, a very quick and straightforward one. I did want to have one numerical question. So what I've asked is, on a scale of one to ten, one being low and ten being high, how useful do you think the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* is right now in teaching Western practitioners? And then the second part is, 'how useful could it be on that same scale of one to ten?'

RA: How useful do you think it is right now? Well, it's completely useful. Ten - it's got to be a ten. But it is.

CN: Well, because you're using it!

RA: Well, as a point of principle, if you think of the Buddha's teaching, I mean, which bit are you going to reject? Shall we say, Dependent Origination is a one or a ten?

CN: Oh - but the idea with this question is in terms of how it is *actually* being taught to people.

RA: In terms of the range of different ways?

CN: Hmm.. how useful is it...

RA: Oh, is it right now, in the practical teaching that goes on?

CN: That's right. It's like - is it being put to good use right now. Whereas the second part of the question casts the net more broadly: 'how useful could it be?'

RA: Well, I think there are times when it's appropriate and there are times when it isn't. So how useful is it? It's very useful. I'll give it an eight. How useful could it be? I'll give it a nine. These are rather arbitrary numbers, I'm afraid.

CN: Well, they are, but it kind of gives you a sense of where people's thinking is. And I have to say that most people I've talked to, it's pretty far down, because it's not part of what they're using. But everyone is seeing the potential of it.

RA: Yes, yes.

CN: So this is one of the things that I'm really wanting to highlight, is that for most of the teachers I'm talking to, there's that recognition of Wow - this is a really fabulous *sutta*. And you know what? I'm not really using it right now. But you're in a very different situation.

RA: Yes, yes. So an eight and a nine.

CN: Ok, great. So the last question is - what have I forgotten? Is there anything that you would like to add?

RA: I don't think so. No. That feels as though that's been very thorough.

CN: Ok. So, I have to say thank you so, so, much for making time for this.

Interview 2. Leigh Brasington

Jhāna and Insight Teacher, no institutional affiliation

Oakland, California

and Claralynn Nunamaker, University of South Wales student, MA Buddhist Studies

Llanover, Wales

Skype call (recorded), 42 min

Date: 17-11-18

CN: So the first one is just, very simply, how do you currently engage with the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta*? And it occurs a couple of times in the *Khuddaka-nikāya*, and it's the same *sutta*. Once it's called *Maṅgala Sutta*, and that's *Sutta-nipāta* 2.4, and then *Khuddaka-patha* 5, that's the *Maṅgala Sutta*. But they're the same. They're exactly the same. So the first question is: How do you currently engage with that? And there are no right or wrong answers here, so it could be 'not at all'.

LB: So, I engage with it very little. I've read it, probably read it half a dozen times. I know that it's in the two places in the *Khuddaka*, and I actually went to the first reference because I knew that would be easiest to find because I didn't have the reference in my head. The fact that I *don't* know the reference off the top of my head indicates that it's not something that I'm using very much, because the stuff that I use, yeah, the numbers stick.

So I've read it, I know there are multiple translations easily available. Ayya Khema mentioned it at least once. We have her on video mentioning that it's very beloved, and she talks about it oh, for, say, a few minutes. I think at other times she actually goes into it. But I've not used it in my teaching at all. But I do appreciate it. I remember Ayya saying that it was very beloved in the East and was chanted almost as frequently as the *Metta Sutta*.

But for me, I haven't ever tried to teach it. I don't think I've ever referenced it in my teachings unless someone happened to ask me a question, and I don't remember that. But it's not part of my usual study, and it's not part of my usual teaching.

CN: Ok, all right, well, that's very clear. Well, then, that answers the next question, which is if you use the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* in your own teaching? So you've just answered that one. So we can - unless you have anything to add - we can buzz through to number three.

LB: Ok, let's go to three.

CN: Ok, right -so number three is: What aspect or aspects of the *sutta* do you find most interesting, relative to your own practice and/or teaching?

LB: For my own practice, it's a brilliant list of things to check in about. 'With fools no company keeping.' Ok, do I hang out with fools? Well, no, I really don't these days. It's a pretty nice life. 'With the wise ever consorting' - yeah, the people I go hang out with ... I mean, so, it's a checklist that is highly relevant.

Though as I say, I don't check in with that checklist very often. Probably most of the times that I've read it are times when I was reading *suttas*, and you know, and it just showed up in the reading. I've probably gone to look at it a couple of times, but only a couple of times. So it doesn't really address what I do, although it is a very good checklist of what *should* be done. And I could make the same recommendations in terms of practice but like I say, I haven't... in terms of *teaching*, I haven't.

CN: Ok, so it's a useful checklist, and you come across it now and again, but it's not one of the active *suttas* in the toolbox that you pull out for your teaching.

LB: Neither for my own practice nor for teaching.

CN: Ok. All right, so if we go on to number four... If we think of the framework of *sīla-samādhī-pañña*, how do you balance your own teaching?

[Digression about poor air quality due to active wildfires.]

LB: So I would say that what I teach is 10% *sīla*, 45% concentration, 45% wisdom. So the *sīla* part gets pretty short.

On the first night, I'll go through the precepts and describe what each of them are, and talk about three levels. The sort of basic 'don't kill', a higher level, 'don't harm', a highest level, 'love all beings'. And the same for each of the precepts. So I go through each of the precepts in detail. Very rarely is there any sort of ceremony about taking the precepts.

I do point out things like, that part of not killing is being respectful of the environment. Because if you aren't respectful or aware of the environment, then you inadvertently are killing lots of creatures. So given the serious environmental problems we have today, the first precept about not killing and the second about not taking what is not given refers to not using up the world's resources, because I'm quite sure that future generations have not given us permission to be using up the world's resources.

So I bring them in, I discuss them, I point out the first and second, the importance of looking at them from an environmental standpoint. And since I'm talking about them on retreat, I talk about celibacy as a way to build a container so people can drop their guard and go inside, which is part of what we want to do on a retreat. Speech – obviously Noble Silence gets talked about. And intoxicants, basically, it's not only avoiding drugs and alcohol but avoiding anything they have a twelve-step programme for, as well as only taking in stuff that's helpful, healthy.

CN: So it sounds like it's really grounded in the precepts and making sure people have a clear, full, rounded understanding of those precepts as you begin the other practices, as you to begin to enter into the retreat period.

LB: Right. I put the precepts out as the foundation. 'This is the rules we're going to run this retreat by', 'this is the foundation on which your concentration and wisdom are built'. And since most people who come to my retreats are interested in *jhānas*, you know, you can't do *jhānas* if you don't have a good foundation of *sīla*. And I usually say something, 'I'm assuming everybody has that

already, but...’, and then talk about the precepts and so forth. So I do mention that the major practice of *sīla* as being taught in the West is the Five Precepts. But that it’s really gotta be everything, and that the basic rule is that it’s all about not harming, both others and yourself.

CN: And, you know, one of the questions that I had is - when I read your book, the emphasis on *sīla* in the beginning is really strong. And it’s just what you’ve just said, that you can’t do *jhānas* unless you have that strong practice of the ethical foundation. And you’ve made it clear that in the retreat setting, you’re really focused on the five precepts. For your own practice, is the *sīla* really grounded in those five precepts? What I’m thinking is that the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* has a lot of different ways that it kind of gives you a *sīla* checklist - it’s a different framework than the five precepts. So for yourself, are you really plugged in to the precepts, or is there a wider understanding of *sīla* that you plug into?

LB: So in particular I’m plugged into the precepts, and the wider understanding is ‘do no harm’. But it often comes back to the precepts. So, I’m thinking of doing something, and then I think, if somebody asked me did I do that, would I be tempted to lie? Why would I be tempted to lie? Well, because the thing I was thinking of doing exactly doesn’t measure up to the way I want to live my life. So the ‘tell the truth’ precept has a lot more power than just in the moment of ‘is this the truth?’, ‘is it useful?’, ‘is it timely?’, etc. But also it has a reflection on - when I’m going to do something, if somebody were to ask me about it, would I lie? - is a very clarifying thing, as to whether what I’m doing is actually wholesome or not.

So I’m usually using the precepts in a sort of broader sense, as my guides, and like I say, not looking at the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* or, there are a few other *suttas* that have things like this, and I’m not using them as well.

[11:11–23:00 Digression about the translations of *kamesu*, *asava*, *rāgo*, *pahīno* and others.]

CN: Five - you’ve already answered most of it - In what ways do you currently teach *sīla* practice? And do you use ‘cornerstone’ practices or texts? It sounds like your cornerstones would be the precepts and then your key question about ‘Does it cause harm?’

LB: Right. So, yeah, the text is the text of the precepts, but it’s presented more in an Americanised way than quoting the literal translation.

CN: Yeah. So that’s actually a nice frame for the next question, which is talking about East versus West. So in terms of teaching practitioners, and I’m thinking either monastics or lay people, how would you describe current use of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* in the East? And then the second part is, ‘in the West?’

LB: Apparently it’s used quite a lot in the East. This is according to Ayya Khema. When I was at Wat Suan Mokkh and they were chanting every morning as I walked to the meditation hall, my Pāli was not good enough to identify what they were chanting, so I don’t know. I didn’t hear the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* chanted, that I recognised. But in talking not only with Ayya but other people who

have spent time at monasteries in the East, it's very frequently chanted. So it appears to be an integral part of the chanting both for the monastics and the lay people. When the laypeople come on the full moon nights, apparently the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* is frequently chanted there, as far as I know. This is all second-hand.

In the West, I don't think I've ever heard another teacher mention the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* except Ayya Khema. I certainly have heard no one teach it. Mmm, I have some vague memory perhaps of it being taught at a retreat at Spirit Rock, but that would have probably been not the Western teachers. So it appears to be taught almost never in the West and at least popularly chanted – I don't know about teaching – but chanted frequently in the East.

CN: Ok. And Ayya Khema did teach it a little bit, you said.

LB: Yeah, I have a vague memory of her actually reading through it...

(25:50-28:21 Searching for a reference for Ayya Khema's talk, which was not located.)

CN: In a conversation on Vimeo with Venerable Anālayo and Professor Hallisey of the Harvard Divinity School, one thing Professor Hallisey said – and I've listened to this many times so I have the exact quote - is: '...the *Maṅgala Sutta* is not taken seriously by academic Buddhists...but I think it is one of the most important texts that we have'. So the first part of the question is simply, Do you agree with that?

LB: I think so. I have never come across it in any academic study of Buddhism in all the papers and books I've read. It just doesn't show up at all.

It's a *sutta* addressing *sīla*, and *sīla* gets very short shrift everywhere in the West, which is where the academics are. So... they're not interested, apparently, in really looking into the teachings on *sīla*. I mean, you know, what are the teachings on *sīla*? Who has written a really good book on *sīla* in the West? It doesn't come up. It's just not there. And so there's no popular books on *sīla*, and academic stuff is more looking at... well, academic stuff is generally tending to look at more obscure stuff.

CN: And certainly I've found very, very little academically written on the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta*... in English. I'm sure that there's probably lots in Sinhala or Thai or something, but in English it's just very, very little. You know, it's 'you can count the papers on your fingers' sort of thing.

LB: Yeah, too bad.

CN: So you've touched on the next question a bit. But I'll ask it specifically - do you think that it's similarly, that the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* is similarly overlooked by Buddhist practitioners and their teachers? And I'm thinking, in the West.

LB: Yes, definitely it's overlooked. Well, as I say, Ayya Khema taught it the most. And maybe a total of 15 minutes, you know, in all of the retreats I was with her. And no one else has mentioned it except perhaps Ajahn Amaro on a retreat or something like that. So it's very much overlooked.

Although I think if you were to say to most teachers 'have you heard of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta*?' they probably would say 'yes'. In other words, there's a bit of familiarity, But then if you were to

ask them, 'What's it about?' then they'd say, 'Oh, the Highest Blessings'. Well, what *are* these 'Highest Blessings'? And I think at that point you would start getting puzzled looks. I think people simply don't know what it's about.

CN: Well, the next part of the question, the last part, is: *Why* do you think, then, that it's overlooked? Do you think that's part of it, that they just don't know what it's about? What's your sense of *why* it's overlooked?

LB: I think *sīla* is given very, very low priority in Western teaching, in general. I've been on retreats where *sīla* just really wasn't even talked about. Maybe the precepts were given as part of a ceremony, but there was no discussion of the precepts or anything.

We chanted the precepts at the Forest Refuge, before every *Dharma* talk, and yet I never heard a *Dhamma* talk on the precepts from anyone other than Ayya Khema. And I've heard quite a variety of teachers. So number one, *sīla* is simply not addressed. And I have actually talked with other teachers who basically are saying the same thing - that *sīla* is simply not being addressed like it should be addressed in the West.

And when it is addressed, mostly, like me, it's just the precepts and maybe some details around the precepts, as opposed to looking at other *suttas*.

James Baraz on one of his Thursday night classes looked at the *Sigālovada Sutta*, which I think is 31 in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the Buddha's Advice to Lay people. And it has some of this. It's prose rather than poetry, and it's rather wordy, and some of it doesn't apply, because we don't have slaves or servants even. But that's one of the few times I can remember somebody addressing behaviour outside of the precepts. It's just, the precepts seem to be about it for talking about *sīla* practice. And so, as I say, I think people are aware this *sutta* exists, and they don't know it, and they don't get around to teaching it.

So now the question comes, why is *sīla* so little taught? I think that goes back to the fact that us hippies, we just didn't like people preaching at us, telling us what to do. We were questioning authority, especially 'questioning authority' meant questioning somebody telling you not to have fun.

And so, you look through here - words, 'well-spoken words civilly'. Well, sometimes you just gotta use a four-letter word. Ah... 'mother and father well supporting'. Well, they should have supported themselves. 'Types of work unconflicting'. Is my job right livelihood? Sure, must be.

'Acts of giving'. Oh, right there, you just got into people's face about not being generous enough. What else? 'From besotting drinks refraining'. Does that mean I can't have a wine with my dinner? You know, there's enough stuff in here that...I mean, the fifth precept probably gets more questions asked about it, in terms of 'Can I have a glass of wine with my dinner?' than any of the other precepts when I teach it.

So... people don't like to be preached at about how they should behave. And they're willing to listen to the precepts, cause - 'Yeah, I'm not into killing; and I'm not into stealing; and yeah, I don't misuse *my* sexual energy; and we're going to be silent, so I don't have to worry too much about that; and, ok, I'm not going to drink while on retreat - I'll have my glass of wine when I get home.' So it's like they're willing to put up with that being told them, but this is actually a lot more... It may impinge a lot more on their lifestyle, and people don't want to do that. So that would be my guess as to why *sīla* isn't being taught.

[36:05–38:23 Digression about translations and *dana*.]

CN: So, again, we've kind of touched on this, but I'll ask the question:

What obstacles or challenges do you see to the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* being taught more to Western practitioners?

LB: Yeah... It's too preachy, to put it bluntly. It's impacting people's lifestyle too much and they don't want to hear stuff like that. They want to find out about their *jhānas* and they want to know what this Dependent Origination stuff is about, and ...you know, are they going to be reborn? And, don't impact my lifestyle while you're doing that.

So I think that it is totally, very, very, useful *Dharma*, and it's also not something that people are particularly hot to hear. And therefore teachers, unfortunately, tend to teach what people want to hear rather than what they need to hear. So it goes.

CN: This is personally challenging to people and kind of calling into question a lot of lifestyle choices?

LB: It's got enough of that in there. And then the other stuff is like, 'Yeah, yeah, I don't hang out with fools'. And 'paying homage to the worthy' - well, who's worthy? There're all sorts of debates there. And 'in the past merits making' - well, maybe, I guess so... So there's a lot of stuff that sort of impacts someone in terms of their past and present lifestyle, and, yeah it's challenging. So, yeah, it would be good to teach it more, definitely.

CN: Well, and that's the lead-in to the next question. I wanted one question where I was putting numbers on things.

LB: Right.

CN: On a scale of one to ten, how useful do you think the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* is right now in teaching Western practitioners?

LB: Well, since it's not being used... it makes it sort of a one. How useful could it be? I'd say at least an eight, yeah, I'd say at least an eight or a nine. Yeah. It's got a lot of really good stuff in it, but it, currently, it's basically unknown.

[Digression about mapping familiarity with the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* on social media.]

But yeah, it's so unknown, and it definitely has value. And it's part of the whole thing in the West: let's give people what they want, let's don't give 'em stuff that they might not want to hear.

[Digression about an anecdote.]

CN: The last question is a very open-ended: Is there anything you'd like to add?

LB: Well, the first thing I want to say is this has been great. I knew it would take more than 15 minutes and I'm loving hanging out with you. That's all I want to add.

Interview 3. Ajahn Candasiri

Senior Nun and *Sīladhara*

Milntuim Hermitage, Forest Sangha

Comrie, Perthshire, Scotland

and Claralynn Nunamaker, University of South Wales student, MA Buddhist Studies

Llanover, Wales

Telephone (recorded), 60 minutes

Date: 05-12-18

CN: So the first question is simply, How do you currently engage with the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta*? And here I'm thinking reading, chanting, teaching – just how do you engage with it?

AC: We chant it from time to time. There is an English version in our chanting book. I'm not particularly keen on the translation. However, it is a very useful reflection for people new to Buddhism. And I also just enjoy pondering it.

CN: And you've done your own translation, is that right?

AC: Well, I put together something for a weekend I gave in Edinburgh this year. Because I don't find any of the existing translations 100% satisfactory, so I took some time to go through it, and words that were puzzling, I looked up in the dictionary.

We chant it in Pāli a lot, actually. It's one of the main *paritta* chants that we do quite regularly.

CN: It's nice in Pāli, isn't it, because you get the full sense, you get the nuances of meaning that you can lose in the English translation.

AC: Yes I guess so, in a way. Yes, yes.

CN: Ok... And the weekend you did – was that fully on the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta*?

AC: Yes, I used it as a background. I have the translation of the *sutta* that I used. The theme of the weekend was Living with Joy. I'm very interested in people knowing what brings joy and what undermines it, and the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* seemed a very useful focus for that.

CN: Hmm. Yes. Interestingly enough, I've just found that the Community of Interbeing uses this *sutta* and the way they translated the title is *Discourse on Happiness*.

AC: Right!

CN: So that sounds very much in alignment with the way that you're thinking of it.

AC: Yes. Well, it's weird, actually, looking at the translation of '*maṅgala*' and '*mahā-maṅgala*'. Because I thought it was about blessings, I always thought of *maṅgala* as being a blessing. The dictionary I have called it an auspicious performance. I found that strange. Anyway, I call it the Highest Blessings.

CN: Yes, '*maṅgala*' is one of those words we don't have a good English translation for.

AC: No, no - I was quite disappointed when I looked in the PTS dictionary, I must say.

CN: I guess it's one of those where we find our own way into the translation.

So, we've kind of talked about the second question, so it's just if you have anything to add to what you've already said? And the second question is: Do you use the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* in your own teaching? And if yes, how and how often?

AC: Well I don't teach that often. I give a talk every week here, and weekends, days of practice, and so on. And I also refer to individual verses, particularly the '*Phuṭṭhassa loka dhammehi, cittaṃ yassa na kampaṭi*' – that one I'm always talking about. And I do also emphasise the importance of good friends. What else do I emphasise? I emphasise many of the aspects of the *sutta* in the teaching, but I don't necessarily refer them directly to the *sutta*. But that particular verse I do talk about, just because I think it's beautifully put.

CN: It is. It is. Ok, and that might actually be part of the reply to the next question, which is: What aspect or aspects of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* do you find most interesting, relative to your own practice or your teaching?

AC: Well, that's one. That's the main one. But I do talk a lot about, and I am interested in, the company we keep. So that's the first one: seeking companionship with the wise and not with foolish people. And just encouraging people to reflect on that. It's a question that often comes up on retreats and things when people begin to realise that their values are changing, and how with people that they used to hang out with, they're no longer interested in what they're interested in. So I do talk about that.

CN: That's true – that is a natural question that often comes up as practice deepens, isn't it, and this is a natural verse to bring up in response to that – yeah.

AC: Yes, yes.

CN: Ok. So, the next question has to do with the framework of *sīla-samādhi-pañña*. So thinking of that framework, *sīla-samādhi-pañña*, how do you balance your own teaching?

AC: Not thinking about the *sutta* particularly, but just in general?

CN: Just in general.

AC: It depends on the situation. Here at Milntuim Hermitage, we always have the precepts; I always talk about *sīla* as the basis for anything else. And the need for focus (*samādhi*) in order to learn about the body and the mind, and the way we create suffering for ourselves (*pañña*). So I tend to speak about all of them, and I do quite emphasise *sīla*. Partly because people don't seem to realise that it matters.

CN: Well, that's right, and that's one of the things I'm interested in finding out with different teachers, how much is *sīla* emphasised or not. Because you see that reflected in the *sutta*. There's a good portion of the *sutta* that's devoted to *sīla*.

AC: Yes, yes, indeed.

CN: So... you keep answering the next questions! Because the next one is: In what ways do you currently teach *sīla* practice, and do you use kind of cornerstone practices or texts?

AC: I give the 5 precepts, and I talk about them. And when I teach a longer retreat, we do the eight precepts. Sometimes I speak about it more, sometimes less, depending on how much time there is. But it's always there as a fundamental, and by that I mean basic foundation for anything else that one might expect from the practice. And I point to how it can lead on to insight. Because when you practice restraint, then you learn about desire, and also you learn about letting go. Then you experience the bliss or the peace that comes when you can really let go of something that you really, really want, or need, or must have, or whatever. So it's not just keeping rules for the sake of keeping them, but seeing them as a training that in themselves can be extremely insightful and beneficial.

CN: Mmm. So you're really seeing it and presenting it as that foundation as part of the practice that connects with the *samādhi* part, is that right?

AC: *Samādhi* and *pañña*.

CN: And *pañña*.

AC: Yes, yes, liberation. Yes, because can't work on desire unless you see it, and you can't really see it unless you practice restraint. Really.

CN: I agree entirely.

AC: (*Poor recording quality, lost words*) a very different sense of it.

CN: So this next one: in terms of teaching practitioners, and I'm thinking either monastics or laity, how would you describe how the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* is currently used in the East, and then the second part is, 'in the West?' And not just your own teaching but your awareness more generally how it's used.

AC: I know that in Sri Lanka, the children all learn to recite it in school. So they all know it.

So when we had the robe offering, I mean, the children sitting in the front row were all chanting along with us. It's part of what they learn at school. I'm not sure how much the practical aspect of it is spoken about or whether they just learn to recite it. I really don't know. So that's what I know of in the East.

In the West, as I said, we recite it in the monasteries. And I talk about it occasionally as a *sutta*, but more often, just the different elements of it come up quite naturally in the teaching. And certainly when I give the precepts, aspects of it. Not all of them, and sometimes I give talks on the *paramitas* – *dāna*, *sīla*, and renunciation, all of these – but not directly related to the *sutta*.

CN: So I'm hearing sometimes you're directly relating things to the *sutta*, like with the '*Phuṭṭhassa loka dhammehi...*', but other times it's more general.

AC: That's right, yes.

CN: Ok. So this one's a bit different. I was looking teachings online that Anālayo had given and I stumbled across this one, which is a conversation - this is on Vimeo -between Anālayo and Professor Hallisey of the Harvard Divinity School. And what Professor Hallisey said - and I listened to this many, many times, so I'm quite certain I've got his words *verbatim* - and he said: '...the *Maṅgala Sutta* is not taken seriously by academic Buddhists...but I think it is one of the most important texts that we have'. So the first part of the question is simply: Do you agree with that?

AC: I'm not an academic and I don't move in such circles. So I can't really comment.

CN: That's fair enough. The second part is: 'Do you think it is similarly overlooked by Buddhist practitioners and teachers?'

AC: Again, I wouldn't like to generalise. I mean, I've never heard a talk about it directly in our monastic community. There've been, actually, reference to certain verses occasionally. But it's not taught, but it's something, as I said, that we chant regularly.

CN: So it's there.

AC: It's definitely there. And everything that's in it is certainly spoken about, but not directly relating to the *sutta* itself. I agree that it's a cornerstone of Buddhist practice, really. It's a wonderful, wonderful teaching.

And what I love about it... is it ok to go on like this?

CN: Oh, absolutely!

AC: What I love about it is that it starts with very, very basic things and leads to the most profound understanding. And it just covers everything in terms of living one's life.

CN: Which is quite extraordinary, isn't it? Given the length of the *sutta*, that it does cover so much of the whole arc of practice.

AC: Yes.

CN: So given what we've just said, one of the questions in my mind is, 'Why don't we use it more in the West?' And that's where this next question is coming from: What obstacles or challenges do you see to the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* being taught more to Western practitioners?

AC: Well, I can just look at my own response to these things. And when I first came across Buddhist teaching, I wanted to get to the advanced stuff. Emptiness, and these kinds of things. And I didn't want to be bothered with being told that I had to be responsible in daily life, or whatever. It was a kind of resistance, basically. For myself, I find that with a lot of the Buddha's teachings - it seems too simple, too obvious to be bothered with. 'Oh yes, I know that' and then you move on to the next thing. It took me a long time to get humble enough to actually really see that, hey, this is really amazing. This is really, really important stuff. And ok, it's obvious, ok, it's basic, it's fundamental, it's not rocket science - and it's really, really worth paying attention to! So I think that's... a sort of sense of actually many people aren't particularly interested in *sīla*. It doesn't seem important. They want to do meditation. You know, *dana*, *sīla*, is not part of what most Western people are interested

in... And this is total generalization, based on I don't know what. But that would be my answer to that question.

CN: Hmm. And I'm just curious, as I hear you say that, if you notice - again in very general terms - if practitioners who have been around the teachings longer are kind of more receptive to the teachings on *sīla*, or does that resistance tend to remain?

AC: Oh, I couldn't say that. I mean I think it depends so much on who presents it and how they present it. I like to imagine that when I talk about these things that people listen and pay attention and think they're important. But I couldn't speak for other people who share reflections on these teachings.

CN: Mmm, ok. Well, we're just about at the end. There's one more question. And I wanted to get quantitative on one question. So here it is: on a scale of one to ten, how useful do you think the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* is right now in teaching Western practitioners? And then the second part is, 'how useful *could* it be?' Where one is low and ten is high.

AC: So are we talking about my own experience?

CN: In general. (Pause) If you have a sense of it. If you don't have a sense of it, then please do ground it in your experience.

AC: Hmm...hmm... I'm just repeating the question: How useful is it now, and how useful could it be?

CN: Yeah, yeah. And I'm realising that it's not so straightforward in your case, because one of the ways that you're teaching it is referring to individual verses rather than teaching the whole *sutta*. So in way, the question is a sort of square peg for a round hole.

AC: Mm.. I mean, certainly the weekend was interesting. I enjoyed it and we had some very useful discussion, and people really engaged with it and in a good way. So I would say that it was a useful exercise. The thing is that our style of teaching is sort of different, it's much more in the moment and intuitive than actually focusing on a text. Although I might use it if we have a study day, as we have from time to time. It's one of the ones I'm thinking of using for one of these study days. So, let's see, I could give it an eight for the usefulness that it can be and an eight for how useful it is now. I mean, maybe seven... seven and a half.

CN: Ok, great. And the last question is very open-ended, and it's just: Is there anything you'd like to add? Maybe something you'd like to elaborate one, or a question that I didn't ask that you wished I had, or anything else?

AC: Well, one of the verses I tripped up over was the very last one where they talk about knowing 'victory' wherever you go. What I preferred was what I found for my own translation: 'In cultivating such qualities as these, beings are ever undaunted, going everywhere with confidence, hence these are the greatest blessings'.

CN: Mmm.

AC: I found that was better than, 'They who live by following this path know victory wherever they go, and every place for them is safe. These are the Highest Blessings'. I mean, I just thought that was exactly true... I mean, every place *isn't* safe, but if you're mindful, then you can have some safety.

CN: And one of the things I think I'm getting a sense of is 'victory wherever you go' has more of a 'power over' feel to it.

AC: Yes.

CN: Whereas the way you approached it, you know, 'everywhere you go, you're undaunted' - that speaks much more to *internal* qualities.

AC: Yes, yes. It's not that you win. It's more just that you're able to... you're not overwhelmed, which seemed like a much more useful way of looking at it.

CN: I've just pulled up Andrew Olendzki's translation. He tends to follow the Pāli more closely than a lot of people. And the way he translated it is, 'Being everywhere unconquered'.

AC: Oh, right.

CN: So sort of a middle ground there between 'victory' and 'undaunted'. Still kind of in that paradigm of 'somebody's conquering someone else'.

AC: I guess I got 'undaunted' from the Pāli dictionary, but I'm not sure. I can't remember where I got it from. I'll have to have a look.

CN: It feels to me more in alignment with... because the Buddha was really into self-development, wasn't he? It really wasn't about power *over* anyone else. It was getting the mind under control...no, not control...being skillful with one's mind.

AC: That's right. And it was actually seeing through states of delusion, so not being overwhelmed by the voices of the mind. So you're not daunted by them. You're not overwhelmed by Mara, basically.

CN: It's a lovely nuance.

[25:30–26:11 Digression about a possible inclusion of aspects of language translation in the dissertation.]

AC: Either external things or your own mind - creations of your own mind. Yes.

(Pause) I was also puzzled by the 'willingness to receive correction'. I questioned that when I was going through it, but I found that that is - it's the '*Khantī ca sovacassatā*' verse: 'Patience and willingness to accept one's faults'. Yes, I was puzzled by that, but I found indeed that is what... it's an openness to feedback, basically, which is good.

CN: Well, but you see, the way that you phrased it has a different feel to it. 'Openness to feedback' has... it's an openness to situations unfolding around you and getting information, rather than 'admitting one's faults', which buys into the whole 'right-wrong' paradigm. So it's these subtleties in language that, you know, they're very important to how open we feel to it.

AC: And I was interested also in seeing 'in association with renunciants, seekers of the truth' because I wondered about that, whether... and it does indeed seem to be that the...(reading

'khanti...') ...the *samaṇa* is a monk or a nun, a renunciant seeker. It's quite specific. So it's not just seeing good people, but it's seeing monks and nuns, which was quite interesting in a way as well. I wasn't very comfortable with it. I didn't like the narrowness of it. And I suppose it's the archetype, really.

CN: Well, one of the interesting things coming out of this research is that if you look at the really early teachings, the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* or the *Pārāyana-vagga*, there's no reference to any kind of settled monastic life, and instead the reference is to a *samaṇa*, or a *muni*, or a sage, or whatnot. So, you know, it's like referencing a wandering ascetic, who has dedicated their life to seeing what's true, and having conversations with them. And that makes a lot of sense. You do all this work kind of cleaning up your act, and then you're ready to have those conversations.

AC: Yes, yes. (Pause) Yes.

There were a few. That's right. The 'generous' verse – '*dānañca dhammacariyā ca*'. It gets translated as 'giving with *dhamma* in the heart', which it's not. It's not that at all, according to what I have found. You know, it's more like being generous and living carefully and responsibly. The '*dhammacariyā ca*' is actually how you live your life according to the *Dhamma*. It's not connected with the being generous. It's another quality, which was interesting to me.

CN: Mmm... mmm... Are there any others?

AC: Any others things that are interesting to me?

CN: Yes, in the translations.

AC: I don't know... I'm just looking through at the ones I sort of got stuck on... That's what I'm doing (*reviewing*)... I mean, I love 'the *devas* are concerned for happiness and ever long for peace, the same is true for humankind. What, then, brings the greatest, Highest Blessing?' Oh – another one, yes! Live in a suitable place, that's right. So the second verse... *patirūpadesavāso...santutṭhi ca kataññutā...* What I came to is, that is the second verse, was to live in a suitable place, and then: 'tasting the blessings from past good deeds'. I liked that, getting away from the sort of 'merit' thing, but just more recognising that if you do something good, that you're allowed to enjoy the good feeling that comes from that. And that nourishes you, that lifts you up, that supports you.

CN: Yeah – well, that word '*puñña*', it's another one that's so difficult to translate into English. So what I hear is that you're looking for something that captures the essence of it, and getting away from that literal translation of 'merit'.

AC: Yes, something that people can relate to, that's not too other-worldly, or superstitious.

CN: Or just confusing. I remember that from my own practice, wondering for years, 'What is this 'merit' stuff?'

AC: Yes. Yes. (Pause) Yes. There's a lot of lovely things in there.

CN: Well, if there are any others that later on, you think, 'Oh, that's another one we should have talked about' do send me an email about it.

AC: Ok, ok.

CN: But I'm going to close recording now, with thanks.

Interview 4. Murray James Corke

Dharmacharya, Community of Interbeing

Cambridge, England

and Claralynn Nunamaker, University of South Wales student, MA Buddhist Studies

Llanover, Wales

Skype call (recorded), 39 min

Date: 12-12-18

CN: So thank you so much.

MC: I'm happy to be involved - it's good.

CN: And you know, I almost missed that the Community of Interbeing - though I've had contact with COI over the years - I almost missed that you use the *Maha-Maṅgala Sutta* because I didn't realise that the *Discourse on Happiness* was that. And the dots connected about three weeks ago. And I thought, ok, we've got to do this.

MC: Good, excellent. Yes, I mean, it is something that is very central to our practice, I think. So I'm really glad that you made that connection.

CN: Yeah, and you know, so much of the *sutta* is about everyday living in relationship with people. And that really aligns closely with my experience of Community of Interbeing as very, kind of, sangha- and community-oriented. So I'm actually quite excited to find out more about how you guys use it.

MC: Ok, good. That's fine.

CN: Now I've got a set of ten questions.

[1:40-1:57 Digression about logistics of the interview.]

CN: So the first question is simply: How do you currently engage with the... instead of saying the *Maha-Maṅgala Sutta* I'll say the *Discourse on Happiness*?

MC: Whichever. Yes.

CN: Yes. And here I'm thinking, do you read it, do you chant it, do you teach occasionally, quite a bit, do you translate it... how do you engage with it?

MC: Yes. I read it pretty frequently. And we read it in my local sangha, fairly regularly. Probably once every couple of months, something like that. We don't chant it.

I do use it in my teaching. I've really been emphasising in the last year the impact of happiness on brain function. And neuroscience is telling us a lot about the structural and functional changes that occur in the brain, and that happiness has a big impact on brain function. So I've certainly been talking quite a lot about that in *Dharma* talks and discussions. And as I say, that's something that I will certainly plan to go on doing into the future as well.

CN: Mmm. And are you using the *Discourse on Happiness* as a touchstone or something as you're talking about the neuroscience and the importance of cultivating happiness, or are they kind of parallel threads?

MC: They're really parallel threads. It's mostly in the context of retreats, and normally when I'm talking, I'm not directly talking about the *Discourse on Happiness*, but I'm taking the insights that are there as the basis for what I'm talking about. At the same time, I think on pretty much every retreat that I'm involved in facilitating, we certainly will read the *Discourse on Happiness* at the end of a meditation with the whole community. So it is very present in what we're doing.

CN: Mm. So it's very much in people's consciousness, even if you're not directly teaching the *sutta* or taking certain lines out of it. That it's more generally in people's awareness?

MC: Yes, I think that's right. And my experience is that most of our local sanghas are very familiar with it, too. It's interesting that the way they're presented in the Plum Village Chanting book, the *Discourse on Happiness* is the second *sutra*, which is listed second only to the *Discourse on Love*.

CN: Oh, wow. Wow - so it's really given prominence, yeah?

MC: Yes, I think that's right. I mean, it's not prioritised as such, but it certainly is very prominent. And as I say, my experience is that most local sanghas are very familiar with it.

CN: Mmm. Ok, great. So, you've actually pretty well answered this next question. So it's now just a question of if you have anything further to add. The second question is: Do you use the *Discourse on Happiness* in your own teaching? And if yes, how and how often? Just is there anything to add?

MC: Yes- I've used it at least four times in the last six months in *Dharma* talks. And, if I think around it a bit more... I may well have used it more than that. But at least four times in the last six months on the retreats I've been involved with. I've also used some of the teachings from it on Days of Mindfulness in that time, as well. So it is, you know, something that I go to frequently.

CN: Ok. So I'm curious particularly, since you use it so often, I'm curious about this third question, which is: What aspect or aspects of the *Discourse on Happiness* do you find most interesting, relative to your own practice and/or your teaching?

MC: Yes, I think the thing that I really like about it is that it's really saying that happiness is not to be found in external things, but happiness is an emergent property of a calm and stable mind. And that that comes about by valuing routine, living a simple life, valuing one's parents and friends... and you know, these are all very everyday things. And in the modern world, we tend to think that happiness is something that we can buy in some shape or form. And that really is a delusion. That sort of happiness tends to be quite ephemeral. Whereas what the *Discourse* is talking about is something far more substantial and sustainable.

CN: Mmm. So it's really looking at the internal cultivation, turning the emphasis from looking at the external to that internal cultivation?

MC: Yes, I think that's right. But I think it's also interesting that it is definitely an emergent property from cultivating those things, rather than something that we can grasp. And that's something that I think, perhaps, eludes the modern world.

CN: That's a really important point and I've not heard other people talk about that. So I'm wondering if you can say a little more about how you see it as an emergent quality, an emergent property? Because that's such an important aspect of it.

MC: Yes, I think emotions are not something we can readily manipulate, but they are things that come into being, if you like. Chemical states in the brain are the result of the inputs that the brain is receiving from the outside as well as from the inside world. So in our interaction with the outside world, as well as what's happening within our minds and the mindfulness we're trying to cultivate to keep our minds from running off after different things. And I think that this idea of an emergent property is a way of putting it - it's probably a 21st-century way of putting it - but Thich Nhat Hanh said, I think, that these things, they water the seeds of happiness that are already present within our consciousness. And that, I think, is a perfectly acceptable way of putting it, because we all have that seed of happiness inside ourselves, and we have to find ways to nurture that seed. But, as I say, we can't do that directly. We do it indirectly by working on things like stability, calmness, generosity, and these sorts of things. So it's very compatible with the very holistic approach of the mind that Buddhism presents.

CN: and I'm getting from the way that you're describing it that it's... you're very much seeing it as a process, rather than a tick-box exercise. It's an ongoing process.

MC: Absolutely, yes. I think if we get goal-orientated about it, happiness will disappear. Whereas, if we commit ourselves to the process, happiness appears without being asked for. And that, I think, is exactly right. It's a process-orientated thing, not a goal-orientated one.

CN: That's right. And then, tying it back to questions of the aspects of the *sutta*, the *sutra*, that you find most interesting, is that you see that is what the *sutra* is talking about - is these different ways to be watering those seeds, essentially?

MC: Exactly, yes. That's right.

CN: Oh, great. That's really, really interesting.

So this next question, it's a little bit different. It's in terms of the framework *sīla-samādhi-pañña*? So, ethical practice, concentration and wisdom. Thinking of the framework, how do you balance your own teaching?

MC: Mmm. Well, as you know, as a Zen school, we're very much a mindfulness-based school. And Thich Nhat Hanh has actually changed *sīla-samādhi*; we would say *prajna* because we use Sanskrit rather than Pāli. But he's changed it to *smṛti-samādhi-prajna*. So, mindfulness. And the reason that he's done that is he says that what we're talking about in *sīla* is not an imposed system of ethics, but really a very natural, experiential way of working that's based on mindfulness of our interactions in

life. And so that's very much the approach that we take to our practice, is that if you develop mindfulness and you continue to practice, understanding or insight, however we translate *prajna*, *pañña*, again are emergent properties. This is quite what we're talking about with *prajna*, is understanding about insight. It's not kind of knowledge-based learning, you know? So what we're really looking at is wisdom. And that is something that can only be gained by experience. And so that's really the approach that we have to that particular triad. Is that if we continue to practice mindfulness, and we're diligent about it, then *samādhi* and *prajna* will quite naturally develop.

CN: Mmm. That's interesting, because one of the things that has struck me as I've been reading and studying the *Discourse on Happiness* is that the word *sati* or *smirti* never occurs, right? But it's a prerequisite...

MC: Absolutely.

CN:...for all of these other things. So that kind of what I'm hearing, is that approach Thay took, is that you have to have the mindfulness to be taking these ethical actions in the first place.

MC: Yes, yes. And you know, all *dharma*s contain all other *dharma*s. So if you have mindfulness, then these other things will be there, too.

CN: Great. So, then, this next question, I don't know what we're going to do with it, because this next question is based on *sīla*. It's: 'In what ways do you currently teach *sīla* practice? And do you use 'cornerstone' practices or texts?'

MC: Well, I mean the texts that we use would be the five and fourteen mindfulness trainings. The five are offered to anybody who wishes to take them who thinks that they would be helpful in their life. They're not viewed as a commitment to continue to practice in the Plum Village tradition. The fourteen are offered to people who recognise that their practice needs to go beyond their own personal needs and are prepared to make a commitment to do that. If you like, that's in the spirit of generosity. That's the approach we tend to use in terms of *sīla*. Because in fact those mindfulness trainings, precepts if you like, are the traditional five precepts, although framed from a mindfulness context.

CN: Yeah, and my memory is that Thay did a lot of work in translating those so that they really make sense, and apply, and people can see the connections in the modern world.

MC: That's right. And they've been subject to a number of revisions over time. Thay's original translations of the five were quite spare. Over time the Order have been asked to contribute to that and kind of added more, if you like, framework for people to actually relate those things to their own lives. And also to link it back into other aspects of the *Dharma*. So that's certainly true of the five.

The fourteen of course were something that Thich Nhat Hanh originally wrote during the time of the Viet Nam War to support people who were involved in essentially doing social work in battle-

torn areas. And so, they are really derived from the five but again with the emphasis in trying to make them applicable into the everyday world.

CN: Mmm, ok. So in terms of supporting people or encouraging ethical practices, primarily you're relying on the five precepts and fourteen mindfulness trainings?

MC: Yes, exactly so. And we try to live by those when we're on retreat, and we encourage people to do the same then in their everyday life. So people who have received the five and the fourteen are encouraged to recite them regularly and to study them and discuss them with friends so that they become very much a part of one's life rather than being a sort of add-on extra.

CN: Mmm. And I'm remembering - I sat a retreat with Thay in Nottingham years ago, and I remember the transmission of the precepts, there was a little rider in there that you needed to recite it, I forget, once every three months or something, as a way to kind of keep the transmission alive.

MC: That's exactly right, yes.

CN: Ok, well, we'll go onto the next question. And this one you may or may not have much to say - I don't know. In terms of teaching practitioners, and I'm thinking either lay or monastic, how would you describe the current use of the *Discourse on Happiness* in the East? And then the second part is, 'in the West?'

MC: I don't think I can speak to this. Certainly in the East, I don't know the experience of that. In the West, it is very central to what we're doing within the Community of Interbeing. I've never really talked with *Dharma* teacher friends in other traditions about how they use it, so I'm really not sure about that.

I do know that when Thich Nhat Hanh has visited India or China or indeed Viet Nam, that the *Discourse on Happiness* is very central to his teaching. He says that if our practice is not bringing us happiness, then it is not sustainable. And he's very clear about that. And I'm sure he's giving that message in the East as well as in the West. But that's as far as I can go on that one, I think.

CN: Ok, great, thank you. And then this next question - again, you may or may not have much comment on it—but I found online, this was a conversation between the Venerable Anālayo, a Theravādan monk, and Professor Hallisey of the Harvard Divinity School. And Professor Hallisey said, and this is a quote from him, '...the *Maṅgala Sutta* is not taken seriously by academic Buddhists...but I think it is one of the most important texts that we have.' So the first part of the question is Do you agree? With either part of that or both?

MC: I mean, I'm an academic myself, and I know that academics tend to run towards complexity and intellectual wrestling. And actually the *Discourse on Happiness* doesn't actually give us much scope to do that. And I suspect that's why it has largely been ignored by academics. It's so straightforward that there's nothing to discuss in many ways. Yes, I think that may well be the case. It's probably... (just sort of looking at the notes that I've made to see whether I have anything to add to that.) I

think it's probably used more by practitioners and teachers than it is by academics who are studying Buddhism. You know, it's... I have a group of friends in Cambridge who are *Dharma* teachers in other traditions, and although we haven't discussed the *Discourse on Happiness* as such, it's pretty clear from their practice that they understand a lot of what is there. And it may well be that they are using it, but I can't comment on that.

CN: Ok. And what I'm finding in these interviews with people in different traditions is that it really varies from tradition to tradition. And yet the basic teachings of living an ethical life, you know, people absorb those not just from this *sutra* but others as well. But the actual focus on this one varies quite a lot among the different traditions.

MC: Yes. I've never brought it up as such, but I know we've had a debate in our *Dharma* teacher group on the impact of happiness on the flexibility of the mind, the ability to change. And in that group are a couple of people who are experienced psychotherapists as well as being *Dharma* teachers. And they're very clear that without happiness, change is almost impossible. So they clearly recognise that. But there is certainly one person in that group who seems to be unconvinced about that particular perspective. And I suspect that's because they're confusing happiness with hedonism.

CN: Ah, right. The Greater Good Science Centre, which is affiliated with UC Berkeley, a couple of people there have been doing a lot of work on happiness. I did an online course with them, and one of the first things they did was said 'Ok, let's define what we mean by happiness'. So that hedonistic type of happiness was ring-fenced as 'that's not what we're talking about here'.

MC: No, absolutely. And it could be that that's another reason why academics run shy of this, because they misinterpret what's meant, that they're thinking of it as hedonism rather than what we know to be a much more fundamental positive emotion.

CN: Well, and the usual translation when you're looking at the Pāli, it varies quite a bit. The understanding can be quite woolly. So you get anything from 'highest blessings' to 'auspicious performance'. So you can look at this and go, 'What's going on here?'

MC: Yes. The translation that we're using is actually a translation that Thich Nhat Hanh has done himself, I guess from the Pāli. So happiness is the word that he chooses to use, which I think probably makes it more accessible to many of us.

CN: Well, exactly. And that's one of the real talents that Thay has, isn't it? It's working with, and teaching, and translating the *suttas* in a way that *is* accessible. And this is a really good translation. Because if you look at it in Pāli, the word for 'happiness', it would be '*sukha*' or '*pāmojja*' or something like that. So he's taken this word '*maṅgala*' – and in no dictionary is it going to be translated as 'happiness' – and yet it conveys something very important of the essence of what the *sutta* is about. So Thay's teaching it, as one of my teachers said once said, 'from the inside out'.

MC: Yes, exactly, that's it.

CN: So you've actually talked quite a bit about the next part of that question, which is, 'Do you think that the *Discourse on Happiness* is similarly overlooked by Buddhist practitioners and their teachers?' And if yes, why do you think it's overlooked? So again, it's simply if you have anything to add to what you've already said.

MC: No, I think we've covered that pretty well.

CN: Ok. And this is a really interesting one. And it's: what challenges or obstacles do you see to the *Discourse on Happiness* being taught more to Western practitioners? And here I'm thinking not just the Community of Interbeing, but the wider body of Buddhist practitioners.

MC: Well I think what we've touched on already about the accessibility of the teaching. If it's framed in polysyllabic, Victorian terms, then actually a lot of people just sort of bounce off that and never actually get into it. I think that's certainly one aspect to it. I think being suspicious of happiness, just talking about hedonism is another one. I think another thing is that is it rather suspiciously simple. And I suspect some people want something they regard as more intellectually robust. You know, Buddhism in the West is very much a middle-class intellectual pursuit, or can be. And so I think there is that tendency to be dismissive of the simple. I think what people forget, though, is that just because something is simple doesn't mean it's easy.

CN: Mmm.

MC: This is a lifetime's practice. It actually requires constant effort. I come from a background of having had long-term depression, and I know that this practice has made a huge difference in my life. And if I want to maintain that difference, I need to continue to practice in this way. It's not always easy. The path contains difficult passages and inevitably will continue to do so. And to be able to continue to cultivate happiness in the face of difficulties is very much what our practice is about, being able to be stable and not be thrown around by the difficulties we all encounter in life. It's really very important. And I think that's, again, something that I'm very grateful to Thay for. He doesn't talk about the effort that's required very much, but there is a constant, steady effort required to continue to apply this kind of teaching to one's life. And that's something that I think is really very critical in using it.

CN: When I hear you talk about the impact it can have on people's lives and has had in your life, it strikes me that that's very much an opportunity in bringing the *sutta* more to people. That it provides a very helpful... the only analogy that's coming to mind is the old 'tool in the toolbox'. But it's providing something very helpful to help buffer the slings and arrows and all the difficulties of everyday life.

MC: Yes, I think that's absolutely right. And I think that analogy of a tool is very valid. I think it is a really valuable tool, and it's certainly something that's made a huge difference to me and I think can make a huge difference to other people. And that's very much the perspective that I tend to

take when I'm teaching in this area, is just to emphasise my *own* experience and to encourage people to try it for themselves and see how it goes.

CN: Mmm, Yes. And that leads us into the next question. And I wanted to get quantitative on one question. So I'm asking on a scale of one to ten, where one is low and ten is high, how useful do you think the *Discourse on Happiness* is right now in teaching Western practitioners? And the second part is, 'how useful could it be?'

MC: Yes, I find it very difficult to answer the first part of that question. I don't have enough knowledge of what other people are doing. But I would have to say that it would probably be somewhere in the middle of the scale, five or six. When I see the somewhat grim faces on the face of some of the practitioners, I kind of feel maybe they haven't actually connected to this. So, yes, as I say, perhaps a five or six. But it would depend on the group. Even in some Zen groups, this huge emphasis on discipline and those sorts of things which I think can be very counterproductive if it's done as an act of will, rather than as an act of love. And so that's a really important distinction. And in terms of how useful could it be, I think it's definitely ten out of ten.

[32:49-34:48 Digression about academic dispassion.]

CN: So the last question is very open-ended, and that is: Is there anything you'd like to add? And that might be a comment, it might be a question you wished I had asked that wasn't asked, or anything else?

MC: No. I'm delighted that you're doing this, and I hope your dissertation will get a lot of publicity because I think it's another way of bringing the attention of other Buddhists the importance of this *sutra*, and so I'm very happy to be involved with this. I don't think I have anything to add. We've talked fairly broadly around the topic. I appreciate your making contact. I've enjoyed this.

CN: I've enjoyed it immensely as well. So thank you once again.

Interview 5. Joseph Goldstein

Vipassana Teacher, Insight Meditation Society

Barre, Massachusetts

and Claralynn Nunamaker, University of South Wales student, MA Buddhist Studies

Llanover, Wales

Skype call (recorded), 37 minutes

Date: 8-11-18

CN: The first question is: 'How do you currently engage with the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta*?' And I'm thinking here do you read it, or teach it, or how do you engage with it?

JG: Not that much, actually, in terms of the specifics of the *sutta* and the teaching of it. So the way I would say I engage with it mostly is in trying to live it.

And then when I'm teaching *metta* – which is not that often – then I might well bring it in or read part of it, or something like that. But the deepest meaning of it is more for how I try to practice it.

I'd say that's the deepest connection. And then from that I'd say bring it in when it's appropriate.

In recent years – I used to teach *metta* more often – I just haven't been doing that lately.

[2:00-3:25 Digression.]

CN: Let's go on to the second question, which is if you use the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* in your own teaching? And you've really already answered that. Is there anything you'd like to add?

JG: When I'm specifically teaching *metta*. But as I say, that's happening less these days.

CN: Fair enough. And the third question is: What aspect(s) of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* do you find most interesting, relative to your own practice and/or teaching?

JG: (*Locating and reading through the sutta*) In reading it, of course, it's all fantastically good advice. And so, in terms of relating to it, it highlights those things which – for me personally – where I'm right on track and practicing it fully, and other elements of it where it highlights the work that still needs to be done. Just in going through each stanza, it's like that. Some I'm already doing and conscious about.

So, for example, even the first few verses, you know, associating with the wise, merit done in the past... the family stuff doesn't really apply to me. But then there's one – austerity and the spiritual life. The 'austerity' part I could use a little work on. And then, of course, the last, 'whose mind does not shake when touched by worldly conditions'. Of course, that's the aspiration. It really highlights the key areas to work on.

CN: I like how you phrase that, that when you read through it, you can see where you're on track. It kind of describes the whole arc of practice.

Ok, so this next question is not particularly rooted exactly in the *sutta* but more generally: As you think of the framework of *śīla-samādhi-pañña*, how do you balance your own teaching? Between

those three?

JG: They are interwoven. The teachings speak a lot about each of them, how *sīla* is needed in the development of concentration. Especially in these times, the importance of right speech – especially given (*lost recording*).

CN: Would it be fair to say that you're relating the teachings to current events?

JG: Not so much when I'm teaching retreats, but in public events, like Q&A. But not so much on retreat. We talk a lot about all three of them and how they support each other.

CN: How they are interwoven?

JG: Yes.

CN: And that's related to the next question, 'How do you teach *sīla*?' And I'm curious if you have any cornerstone texts or practices that you use?

JG: Hmm, it happens in different ways, you know. So one way that it all gets combined is when we are teaching the Eightfold Path, because all three components of course are part of the path. And depending on the length of the retreat... So for example when I was teaching at the Forest Refuge, I would give one or two talks on each of the steps of the Eightfold Path, so there would be a lot on Right Speech or Right Action. So really highlighting the *sīla* aspect in that way.

I talk a lot about – how to say it – the positive aspects of the precepts. So one thing I talk a lot about is the practice of generosity. Because it's been such a good practice for me, and so beautiful. So that comes up a lot and I think in one way falls under the rubric of *sīla*, even though it's talking about the positive aspect rather than the refraining aspect.

CN: And it occurs to me as you say that is that one of the reasons I've got so many *sīla* questions, is that when you look at the arc of practice described in the *Maṅgala Sutta*, a lot of it is concentrated on *sīla*...

JG: Yes, yes.

CN: ...and it strikes me that what you're saying about generosity – generosity is explicitly in there. So generosity is absolutely part of this rubric. It's not its own bit in the Eightfold Path but it's squarely in the front and centre of practice.

JG: Yes, and the Buddha, as you know, the way he described the graduated teachings, another framework besides *sīla-samādhi-pañña* is *dāna-sīla-bhāvanā*.

CN: Yes.

JG: So that's another framework for the whole teaching. So then *dāna* is really, is *really* front and centre as the basis for the rest. So I talk a lot about that. And I talk a lot about Right Speech because it just seems such a key part of bringing the practice into one's life, and it's such a fantastic mindfulness practice.

CN: Absolutely...

[14:09-15:15 Digression about Right Speech.]

CN: In terms of teaching practitioners, whether it's monastics or laypeople, how would you describe the current use of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta*? The first part of the question is in the East, and the second part is, 'in the West?'

JG: Well, broadly speaking, of course, I think the devotional aspect is much stronger in the East, you know. Especially compared to - I don't know the right word - I think in the Asian communities in the West, it probably plays a big role. In the non-Asian practitioners in the West, I think it's less. The devotional aspect is not, for many people - of course there are some devotional temperaments for whom it's very strong - but generally it's not the same as when you're in Asia. You know, the quality of devotion, that particular quality. And so I think the *Maṅgala Sutta* and the recitation of it, you might say it very broadly falls into a devotional aspect as well. So I think it's probably more integrated into the teachings in the East than it is here.

CN: Yeah, and then you bring up that important point also that within the Eastern/ Asian communities that are in the West...

JG: Right, right. So there's been some criticism of how Buddhism in the West is portrayed, because it's usually portrayed in like the Buddhist magazines - although they've gotten criticised for this and they're changing - of how it's very white-centric. You know, the Anglo - even though 'Anglo' is not exactly the right word - representation. But of course there's a very big Asian Buddhist culture in the West. So I think it's important that that be acknowledged and the differences that exist in the two communities.

CN: Absolutely, and then there's the cross-pollination that happens.

JG: Yes, yes, exactly.

CN: Ok, so we're ticking right along, we're at number seven. And this is the longest one. I've set it up and then there are three short parts to it. So there's a conversation on Vimeo where Venerable Anālayo and Professor Hallisey of the Harvard Divinity School are having a conversation, and Professor Hallisey said, and this is a quote: '...the *Maṅgala Sutta* is not taken seriously by academic Buddhists...but I think it is one of the most important texts that we have.' unquote.' So the first part is simply, 'Do you agree?' (pause)

And again, that statement was: '...the *Maṅgala Sutta* is not taken seriously by academic Buddhists...but I think it is one of the most important texts that we have.'

JG: Well, I definitely agree with the second part, because in some ways it's almost like a brilliant condensation of the teachings. You know, it's like everything is in there.

I'm not part of the academic world at all, so I don't really know how it's held in that world.

CN: Ok, well then, the second part of the question is for you. And that is: 'Do you think it is similarly overlooked by Buddhist practitioners and the lay teachers?'

JG: Ah, I don't. I wouldn't say that it's overlooked. It's certainly... it comes up not infrequently, you

know, in the teaching, so it's definitely not overlooked.

CN: So it's kind of on people's radar screen?

JG: Yes, yes. I think if you asked most, many practitioners, they would know what you're talking about. So it's not like some obscure *sutta*. So I would not say that it's overlooked.

CN: Ok.

JG: Yes, and I think for practitioners – well, I'll stick with myself, extrapolating from myself - I don't see why it wouldn't be taken seriously because all of the *Dharma* points are pretty essential to the teachings.

CN: Yeah, yeah.

JG: As you go through the different stanzas, it's like, 'Oh, yeah – this is what the teachings are about.' You know, and as I said, it's really a beautiful condensation of it. The ... let's see... (*pausing and referring to text*).

CN: I have to confess to have fallen in love with the *sutta* just for those reasons. It's such a beautiful, terse...

JG: Yes, exactly. Exactly.

CN: ... but it's like all-inclusive.

JG: Yeah, yeah. But I mean, some of the language, you know, might be considered a little archaic. For example, just the line, 'serving one's mother and father'. So, the idea is certainly important. I don't think it's how we would talk about it.

CN: But it also could be argued that that has to do with translation. Because if you look at the Pāli, that's '*upaṭṭhānaṃ*, and the *ṭhānaṃ* is like 'establishment'. So I think of that as making sure your parents are established, right? You know, like making sure they have a house, and ...

JG: Yeah... yeah.. I think it is a problem of translation... but of course since I'm not a Pāli scholar, this is what I've got. (ha)

One time Sayadaw Pandita was teaching here, and this was a public talk. And this came not from the *Mangala Sutta* but a similar *sutta*, describing the wholesome lay life and how the wife should get up before the husband and prepare everything, and going on and on like that.

And the next morning he asked me about the talk, and in a moment of unfortunate honesty, I said, 'Well, some of it is a little old-fashioned. I don't think that part went over too well with the women in the group.' And then that night in the talk, he said, 'Some people think the teachings of the Buddha are old-fashioned.'

JG and CN: (ha ha)

JG: And so there is a translation...

CN: There is. And you know, personally, my Pāli isn't terrific, but it's enough to go in and investigate things. And every time there's this kind of smell of 'power-over', whenever I investigate it, there's at worst an alternative translation in the Pāli.

JG: Right, right.

CN: That seems to be largely what we've done culturally, translating it into English.

JG: That might be worth pointing out, if it's appropriate in the dissertation.

CN: Oh, yeah, absolutely. That's a good idea, to take a few examples of words just like that, like '*upaṭṭhānaṃ*', and the different ways it can be translated, and the nuances.

JG: I think that would be helpful, because I think people might not... for those who don't take it seriously, it might be little things like that in the *sutta* that just seem archaic. 'Yeah, oh, well, this is just, you know...' (*dismissive hand gesture*). So they miss actually the deeper import of it.

CN: That's a great idea and one that won't take very many words out of the 15,000-word word count.

CN: Ok, so we're nearing the end here. The next question - the third part of that question is a non-starter - so we're on to question number eight. And that is: Do you see any obstacles or challenges to the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* being taught more to Western practitioners?

JG: Ah...(pause)

CN: And I guess one we've just talked about, that some of the language could be perceived as archaic.

JG: Well, in different of the stanzas, there are some lines that really refer to the cosmology, which people sometimes shy away from talking about. So, for example, just the back story of the *devas* and humans beings. A lot of Westerners - the concept of *devas*, it's not part of their worldview. Or the idea of 'merit done in the past'. So some of those concepts really need unpacking. So I don't know if you want to call it an obstacle to teaching it, but it's something that, if one were teaching the *sutta*, would take some explanation.

CN: Well, that's right, and it's 'obstacles or challenges'.

JG: Right, so that would be the challenge.

CN: So that would be under the heading of a challenge. It's that sort of invitation to be specific about how these words can be interpreted in a way that's consistent with the Western worldview?

JG: Weelll.. I wouldn't say that so much, because some of it is *not* consistent with the Western world view. So I think it's pointing out, or trying to explain, that these *are* the teachings, as far as we know. These are the teachings of the Buddha. They're pretty early. And so I think the challenge is opening people's minds to possibilities that are outside their own worldview, and really trying to explain, even the concept of 'merit'. You know, in English, 'making merit' -

in a way it's an unfortunate term, it kind of feels like collecting gold stars. But it's such an important part of the teachings. So the challenge would be really explaining the deeper implication of merit and that then it's bringing in a discussion of rebirth and past lives, which really is outside the Western... it's not a part of the Western world view.

CN: So originally I was thinking that what you were pointing to was more of a Stephen Batchelor

way of looking at it.

JG: Not at all.

CN: But you're coming from more of an early Buddhist sort of place...

JG: I'm not a subscriber. Stephen's an old friend, but I do not subscribe to his views.

CN: Ok.

JG: Yeah, because I...

CN: Well the Buddha was quite clear about that.

JG: Exactly. Well, exactly. You know, to me a lot of these teachings are throughout all the *suttas*. So to say that it's some peripheral aspect doesn't seem to make sense to me.

CN: Right, so repackaging it to be more palatable to Westerners, the challenge, as you see it, is opening the minds of Westerners to this territory that is, you know, foreign to us?

JG: Exactly, exactly. And I think the particular Western slant in doing that is reiterating that there's no demand for belief. You know, it's not that this is being put out and 'you need to believe it'. But to acknowledge that it is actually part of the Buddha's teachings, and so we might want to explore, acknowledging that there are many things beyond our current range of understanding. So there's a little bit of humility in realising we don't know everything.

CN: That's right.

JG: Munindra, my first teacher, when he would be talking about the *deva* worlds, he would say, 'You don't have to believe it. It's *true*, but you don't have to believe it.'

JG and CN: (ha ha)

JG: Yeah, so I think that it is important. This *sutta* *could* be used as an education for people, you know, in certain arenas that do fall outside one's current understanding. So that's a beautiful challenge for teachers.

CN: And the way I hear you framing it, it's a challenge and an opportunity.

JG: Absolutely, absolutely. I don't shy away from talking about this stuff, because I do incline to believe it, even though I don't have personal experience of all the realms. Yeah, so I like talking about it and I think that it's important. A particular example, just that line about merit – that's a huge topic, very significant, not talked about very much. I haven't heard many Westerners talk about the whole notion of merit. But it's so...

CN: It's another one that is quite foreign to us?

JG: Yeah.

CN: And the vocabulary doesn't have, like, a solid cultural grounding to it.

JG: Exactly.

CN: You say 'merit' and it's like we're standing on quicksand, trying to understand what it is.

JF: Yeah, yeah. But it's really important and it's right here in the *sutta*. It's a beautiful opportunity.

CN: That's right. Ok just two left. So, I wanted to get quantitative on one question. So it's a scale of one to ten, one is low and ten is high. How useful do you think the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* is right now in teaching Western practitioners? And also how useful do you think it could be? Both on a scale of one to ten, where one is low and ten is high.

JG: Well, the second part, I would put it a ten. It could be extremely valuable. If for example, a *Dhamma* talk went through each stanza, you could get many more than one talk out of this. There's so much there. So I think the opportunity is there, great opportunity.

CN: Bhikkhu Bodhi, he's got a series of online talks on about the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* and he said, I think it was Sri Lanka, that's exactly what they do... each week the talk will be on one stanza. So you're spot on there.

JG: I don't think that it is used that much in the West now in that way.

CN: So if you were to pick a number...?

JG: You're talking specifically about the use of the *sutta*, rather than some of the concepts that are in it?

CN: That's right, that's right.

JG: Yeah, so I don't think...Hmmm...

CN: Would it be all the way down at...?

JG: A two, a two or three. I'm just thinking back to all the *Dhamma* talks I've given or heard other teachers give. And it's sometimes referred to, but I don't think it's used...I haven't heard it used specifically very often. Other than the chanting, it often is...

CN: That's right, in the more devotional aspect.

JG: Yeah.

CN: Ok, great. And then the last one is just quite open-ended: Is there anything you'd like to add?

JG: You're inspiring me to give a talk on the *sutta*.

CN: Really?

JG: Yeah. Just in talking about it I'm realising it'd be a great framework just for a talk, or more than one talk. So thank you. It wouldn't have been on my radar.

[Digression and closing, with thanks.]

Interview 6. Kalyanavaca

Order Member, Triratna Buddhist Order, London Buddhist Centre,
London

and Claralynn Nunamaker, University of South Wales student, MA Buddhist Studies
Llanover, Wales

Zoom call (recorded), 56 minutes

Date: 22-11-18

CN: And just so we've got that resource on the recorded portion, was that FreeBuddhistAudio?

KV: Freebuddhistaudio.com, and they have talks by Sangharakshita and other order members, but also seminars that he did, mostly in the 80s. So they're very old seminars. All the transcripts of the seminars are up on the website. And they're searchable so you can have a look for anything you're interested in searching. And he's also done a series of chanting of the *suttas*, and I know that the *Maṅgala Sutta* is one of them.

[1:25-1:45 Digression about logistics regarding the video conferencing programme.]

CN: Shall we go ahead and go through the questions and then we can do more catching up at the end as well?

KV: Yeah, yeah.

CN: So the first one - and some of this you've already said a little bit about, but if you could just repeat it so it's on the recorded portion, that would be very helpful, because I'm going to transcribe all of these. So the first question is: How do you currently engage with the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta*? (And here I'm thinking reading, chanting, teaching... you know, how do you engage with it?)

KV: Well, currently I don't engage with it, really. I had a quick look at it because I knew I was going to be talking to you about it. But it's not one of our major texts, really. We do study it in our *mitra* study course, and when we get to year three and there's a module called *Suttas* from the Pāli Canon. And it's in that module. And that module is one of the core modules. So there are about eight modules that people can choose from, but they have to study that module, and they also have to study the Bodhisattva ideal module from that year. But I'm not currently doing *mitra* study teaching. I'm not teaching anything at the moment in that way.

CN: So when people are choosing their modules - and you said that this is one of the modules that would be required rather than optional...

KV: Yeah, it's not optional.

CN: Where are they in their practice when they're doing that? Is that for people who are new, or have a bit of practice?

KV: They're not that new because it's year three of the course. So they'll have done the foundation year, and another year's study before they get to year three. So they wouldn't be that new. I mean,

it depends what you mean by 'new', you know. But it's certainly in their first few years of practice. Serious practice.

CN: It's people who will have covered some of the foundational teachings already and then this is growing on top of that.

KV: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

CN: Then you've pretty well answered the second question as well, which is do you use the MMS in your own teaching? And if yes, how and how often?

KV: No, I don't.

CN: It's really just that being embedded in the *mitra* study programme, yeah?

KV: Yeah, so if I was doing a *mitra* study module, if I actually had a group that I was teaching, I would be going through that module with them. And we would study the *Maṅgala Sutta*. And we would ask people to not only just read it, but reflect on it. And there are a series of questions at the end of each module, so that people can reflect on the questions that are asked.

I mean, some of the interesting questions - I don't know if you want me to go into that -

CN: Oh, absolutely...

KV: Some of the interesting questions, I thought anyway, in this module, were to do with the relationship between the *bhikkhus* and the laity. Because he talks about, the Buddha's talking about lay followers, giving advice to lay followers. But he also gives advice to what he calls the renunciant, which I'm assuming are the *bhikkhus*, the ones who are fully engaged in *bhikkhu*-like practices. I'm not exactly sure what they do... sort of full-timers, I would say. And the lay followers, he gives very good advice to them as well. Mainly ethical advice. It looks like to me he's advising them to follow the precepts and to actually have some kind of connection with the *bhikkhus* or *dharma* teachers. That kind of like comes after the basic advice. So there's the basic advice like honouring your mum and dad, and that kind of thing, looking after your family, and practicing the precepts - you know, not getting intoxicated, all that kind of stuff. And then a bit further down in the *sutta* he is actually saying 'discuss the *dharma* at a suitable time', you know, with suitable people, presumably. So that implies to me that there is a connection between the lay followers and the monastic followers. Certainly at the time of the Buddha. I don't know if that's still the case in the Theravādan world. But at the time of the Buddha, it was the case.

CN: And it's interesting, because if you look at the very earliest teachings like the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* or the *Pārāyana-vagga*, there's no reference to a settled monastic life... so he's talking about *bhikkhus*, he's talking about *samaṇā*, he's talking about *muni*, he's talking about sages. And when you get to the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* which, as near as I can tell, is just a little bit later - still within the Buddha's lifetime, but kind of later in his teaching career, the word he's using there, he's not referring to monastic community, he's using '*samaṇa*'.

KV: Ah, that's interesting, because obviously I just read the English, so I didn't know he was referring to *samaṇa*.

CN: Yeah, well I didn't think to drill down until I saw this linguistic splitting of hairs and what those terms implied. So I looked at it, and there it was.

KV: Yeah, I think you're right. I mean, in the early days, the Buddha... there weren't any settled *vihāras* or anything because he wanted the monks to wander. And, you know, his followers, so that they could teach, spread the teaching. And I think the only time he settled was during the rainy season. And then they built themselves little *kutis* and *vihāras* to be sheltered. And I think that's where the monasteries, they kind of grew out of that. And then they stopped the wandering lifestyle. So a bit later... well, the Buddha never stopped, did he? He kept wandering, right up until when he died, he was still doing his wandering.

CN: Well, that's right. And you know, *visiting* settled monastic communities but that's what you hear, isn't it? He goes and he sees that there's a dispute here or there, and he goes off and does a self-retreat.

KV: That's right. That's right. And he visits. And he's given, or rather the community is given, a lot of places like parks where they can go and practice. Like the Bamboo Grove and the Squirrels Feeding Ground, and they have all these exotic names, don't they, these places? And the Buddha does go and visit them, or even stays at them sometimes, but I think he was more of a wanderer.

CN: Yeah. And certainly, again in the context of this *sutta*, the operative word is '*samaṇa*' rather than '*vihāra*' or something like that.

KV: Yeah, yeah. I find it interesting that in this *sutta*, that it's actually a *deva* that asks the Buddha. You know, the opening of the *sutta* is actually a *deva* asking the Buddha what are the most conducive conditions for practice. I think that's really interesting, because these days, you know, how would you explain *devas*? But in the Buddha's day, there didn't seem to be that much distinction between the human realm and the *deva* realm.

CN: They were both taken to be obviously in existence.

KV: Yeah, yeah, yeah, and there was a lot of communication between them. And the *devas* wanted to learn from the Buddha as well.

CN: Absolutely, and as evidenced by this *sutta*.

KV: Yeah, yeah.

CN: So touching back, before we go on to the next question - you said that there were the questions for reflection at the end of that module. And I'm wondering if there are any other of those questions for reflection that come to mind? And also, I was wondering, are those questions for, like, internal reflection, or discussion, or do people write about it? You know, *how* do they reflect?

KV: Both. Usually, our study groups meet once a week, and they have to prepare for the study group. So they'll use the questions to reflect and then in the study group they'll be discussing them.

So if they haven't prepared much, the discussion won't go very far. But, you know, most people take it seriously. Yeah, they don't have to write essays or anything - I guess they could if they wanted to. And at the end of each module, they need to prepare some kind of project on something that struck them. So, say the *Maṅgala Sutta* had struck somebody as being really special, they could write a project or deliver some kind of project on the *sutta*, and everyone listens to that, including the teachers. And we can make comments if we want to. But usually they're really well done, they take it seriously. They present decent papers or talks, or sometimes somebody will write a poem or paint a picture. So it doesn't have to be a talk. Most people give talks.

CN: It's not anything to do any great research into, but just off the top of your head, are you aware of anyone who has done their project on the *Maṅgala Sutta*?

KV: Oh... no, I'm not. It's a long time since I've done *mitra* studies. It's a few years now, and I can't remember.

CN: Well, if anyone comes to mind at two in the morning, fire me an email. I wanted to ask the question to be thorough.

KV: Yeah - no, I can't think of anyone who has, but I'm sure there will be, we've got so many *mitras* doing the course, there's bound to be somebody who has been struck by the *Maṅgala Sutta*. Yeah, especially as Bhante did do a seminar on it, so he must have felt it was really important- you know, he wouldn't do a seminar on just any *sutta*. So he did do a seminar on it, a whole seminar.

CN: And is that the one that you were saying...

KV: That I was referring to before. It's called *Auspicious Signs*, yeah. It's definitely online, so you can have a look at it. I don't think the audio of the seminar will be online, but the transcription will be. So it'll be like being there, because you read what he says, and you read what the students at the time were thinking. Fascinating, these old seminars.

CN: But also, 'old' is relative, isn't it?

KV: Yeah, it's true. But they are. It's now 2018 and he gave those in the early 80s, a lot of them. Some were even in the 70s. It's quite a long time ago. And you know, the Buddhist world has changed out of all recognition over here since then. I guess some of the early seminars are just really, really, basic *Dharma*. Because he needed to teach people basic *Dharma*.

CN: And it would have made sense that he would have included that, because he had so many influences from the East. And he would have been well aware of how much this *sutta* was used in the East. So it makes sense that he would have introduced it.

KV: He would have, definitely, because he was a *bhikkhu* himself for many years.

So he must have done what they do, doing the chanting and.. yeah, I'm not sure which tradition he was in, but it was some kind of Theravādan tradition that he was ordained in.

[15:55-19:34 Digression about women in modern Theravādan Buddhism.]

CN: Let's move on... the next question is: What aspect or aspects of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* do you find most interesting, relative to your own practice and/or teaching?

KV: Hmm... that's interesting, isn't it? It's a bit difficult to answer that one, because in our order, there isn't the monk-lay divide. But I think it's interesting because ours is a non-monastic ordination, though we do have celibate practitioners, but we don't call ourselves monastic. And I think that was one of the big things that Sangharakshita found difficult with that whole Theravādan tradition, the fact that the laity was kind of, almost disregarded, that their role was to support the monastics. That was it. That was how they practiced. And that was how they made merit. And he thought that was *not* what the Buddha had taught. And you can see that in this *sutta*, that the Buddha, he's giving advice to all the different communities of his followers. The lay were included, and they were encouraged to communicate on dharmic terms. So I find *that* interesting. That's an interesting aspect of the *sutta*.

CN: That there was that real clear focus on teaching the laity things that they should do, and also part of that was encouraging that direct communication and dialogue with the 'professionals'?

KV: Yeah, yeah. And I think that Sangharakshita got upset - if he could get upset - that he thought the split that what he saw, anyway - I don't know if it's changed now - but when he was a *bhikkhu*, the split was really great. And the lay people, I mean, they didn't really practice, they didn't meditate. What they did was support the monastics - you know, give them food and robes and all the rest of it. But they didn't actually meditate, as far as he could tell. In fact, I think he said that a lot of the monks didn't meditate. (ha) So I don't know what they did to do full-time practice? What were they doing? Maybe they were studying? I don't know what they were doing. He didn't go into that very much. But, yeah, I think that's one of the interesting things in this *sutta*. That it's so clear. It's a really clear teaching for all levels of practitioners. That's what I would say is most interesting. It covers the whole of the spiritual life, really. It even goes up to enlightenment.

CN: Absolutely.

KV: If you can practice all of these things, you'll become enlightened!

CN: It's one of the extraordinary things about this *sutta*, that here you have, what is it, a dozen verses, that cover the whole practice.

KV: Indeed, indeed. So it's interesting that it isn't more, certainly in our tradition, it's not more used. But I guess it's 'cause we have so many other things that we use as well, you know.

CN: And at the same time, it *is* there in the module for the *mitra* study programme.

KV: Oh yeah, yeah. It's definitely in there, along with other Pāli *suttas*. I think there are about eight that have been selected. And they were selected because Bhante thought they were important.

CN: All right. Well, if we can go on to the next question, and this is a question about your own teaching: Thinking about the framework of *sīla-samādhi-pañña*, how do you balance your own teaching?

KV: Hmm well, I'm not doing a lot of teaching these days. I do still teach meditation, although not very often. But as I say I'm not teaching *Dharma* as a study leader at the moment. Actually I'm thinking about doing it again, because I'm missing it. I'm missing that part. I do give the occasional *Dharma* talk as well.

CN: And you've done it in the past.

KV: Oh, yeah, I've done years of it in the past. Yeah, decades.

CN: So thinking back to when you were teaching it, if you were to superimpose that frame of *sīla-samādhi-pañña*...

KV: Well, *sīla*'s obvious. That is daily practice of the precepts. That's a very big part of my practice. Trying to practice the precepts. Not always very successfully. And I think living in a residential community helps with that, because you get mirrored back very quickly if you go off track. Yeah, so that's a big part. And *samādhi*, I take that to mean meditation practice, which I do regularly, every day with my community. Or as many of them that come – they don't all come. Most of them are there in the morning. So I meditate every day. And we always chant something before we meditate. So it could be a *pūjā*... we don't chant the *Maṅgala Sutta*, but we do chant the Refuges and Precepts, the *Tiratana-vandana*, the *Dhammapālaṃ Gāthā*, and the *Avataṃsaka*, a bit of, not the whole thing!

KV and CN: (ha ha)

KV: And refuges and precepts. So we always start with chanting and then we meditate. And we vary that week to week, so we do something different every week. We've got a kind of cycle that we repeat. So this week we're doing the morning *pūjā*. So that requires us to chant the Four Mind-Turning Reflections and then we do the refuges and precepts, and at the end we chant the Four *Brahma Vihāras*: 'May all beings enjoy happiness and causes of happiness,' etc. We do that, and then we do our meditation. So I'll be doing different meditations. It won't be the same thing every day. But I find it an essential start to the day, the morning meditation. And I'll often go to classes as well. You know, I teach at some classes. So I give talks, or I lead meditations, or lead *pūjās* at the Centre. And sometimes I go to some of our outlying groups and give talks there. And *pañña*, that is more to do with trying to see through the self. Mostly that would be either in a meditative way or noticing when the self sort of rears its head during the day. What we call Reaction Practice. So if you have a reaction, it's an opportunity for insight because you're trying to see through the view – Why am I reacting here? What's underneath that reaction? What view is there? It's usually self-view, of course, in some form or another.

CN: That's really interesting. So it's like mindfulness and investigation of the reaction.

KV: That's right. And recently, with a few friends, I've set up a Reaction Practice group. So we meet every week and somebody will bring a reaction and we'll go into it with them. So that's been good. And another important part of my practice is that I go to a Chapter meeting every week and we do confession practice. And we recite the refuges and precepts there as well. And every month we have some kind of Order gathering. It's either an Order day or an Order weekend. So the end of this week I'll be going to Adhithana to an Order weekend. There'll be about 130 of us there. So we practice together like that as well.

CN: Very, very strong sangha.

KV: Quite a lot of practice happening.

CN: And this is the next question: When you think about the teaching that you do, in what ways do you currently teach *sīla* practice? And do you use 'cornerstone' practices or texts?

(pause) So one thing you've talked about is the precepts, and ..

KV: That's our main text, I suppose, the Five Precepts for the lay people. And we as Order Members take ten precepts. And also Bhante has given us positive counterparts to the precepts. So we chant the precepts in Pāli, actually. We chant them in Pāli. And the Pāli is, you know, when you translate it, it's 'I undertake to abstain from...' whatever it is. And what he did was he gave us five positive counterparts. So for example with the first precept, we chant '*pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*', then 'I undertake to abstain from taking life' (the negative formulation), and then we recite the positive: 'With deeds of loving-kindness, I purify my body.' So that's the first precept in its fullness, really. He considered it wasn't enough to abstain from doing things, that you had to actually positively practice the opposite.

It's not enough just to not taken the not given, you have to practice generosity.

CN: Sort of the equivalent of pulling up weeds but then planting flowers.

KV: Absolutely, you could say. I think the positive precepts are like the spirit of the precepts. It's what you're actually wanting to be like, instead of just renouncing the things you don't want to be like. You're trying to actively create a being that lives in that kind of way. And I guess if one could fully practice the precepts, one would be not be too far from being enlightened. Because you would be acting, spontaneously acting, as though you were a Buddha. Because that's how a Buddha acts.

CN: And it strikes me the similarity between the way your Order practices the precepts with the positive aspect and the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* where all of these pieces of advice to the laity are given in the positive aspect: 'these are the things that you do...'

KV: That you *do*, exactly.

CN:... rather than 'these are the things that you refrain from'. So there's a similarity there in terms of active cultivation.

KV: Yeah, because it does, it does say that. Practice generosity ... it does say that, yeah. So maybe he (*referring to Sangharakshita*) got it from there. I don't know where he got them from. I assume he just

thought it was important for us in the West to have that side of it because of our Christian heritage, which was all, 'Thou shalt not...'

CN: That's right, that's right. It sets up a different feeling about it, doesn't it? Rather than fear and aversion, it's more of an attraction.

KV: Yeah, and it's more like how you want to be as a human being, which is what the *Dharma's* all about, isn't it? Developing ourselves as human beings and becoming more positive, more mindful, more compassionate, wiser. Otherwise, why would you bother? It's not an easy path.

CN: It's not an easy path.

KV: You could just hang up your beads and go and watch the telly or something.

CN: Just keep going around in circles in *saṃsāra*, though.

KV: Absolutely. I know.

CN: So we're about half-way through, although I think the next half will go a little bit more quickly. Number six is: In terms of teaching practitioners, whether monastic or laity, how would you describe the current use of the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* in the East? And then the second part of the question is, 'in the West?' And it's just to the extent that you know how it is practiced.

KV: Well, I'm only familiar with my own tradition. So I cannot say really say I have any knowledge about how it's practiced in the East. I assume that it's chanted, but how many people actually put it into practice, follow the teachings within it, I have no idea. I don't know how you'd measure that.

CN: One thing I'm thinking is, with the *sutta* being embedded in the *mitra* module, would that be the same for the Order members in the East as it is for the West? Or would they have their own set of modules, developed differently?

KV: Now that's a good question. I just assumed they would follow the Western *mitra* course. But they may well have developed their own because of a lot of them don't speak English, in India anyway. They've probably got Hindi or Marathi versions. But I imagine it's still based on the same texts and the same sutras. But they probably have translated it in to their own languages, I'd imagine.

CN: And then in the West, you've described how it's used within your own Order. Are you aware of other...

KV: I'm not aware of other traditions that use it. I would assume – I mean, this is just me talking off the top of my head –but I would assume that it was used in the Southern school more than the Tibetans. I don't know if the Tibetans would even look at the Pāli Canon. I've no idea what they do. Mostly their practice seems to be mostly *pūjā* and visualization and ... we do a lot of that as well, but I don't know if they use the Pāli Canon at all.

CN: It's in their transmission. I've found that the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* is in a group of Theravādan texts that was transmitted. So it's there in the Kanjur. But I have no idea if they use it. And my source says that it hasn't been translated into English. So if it is used, it would be in the East.

KV: I don't know, is my answer to that.

[38:00-39:15 Digression about speculations of practice.]

CN: I've found online there's a conversation on Vimeo between Venerable Anālayo and Professor Hallisey who's of the Harvard Divinity School this is what Professor Hallisey said: '...the *Maṅgala Sutta* is not taken seriously by academic Buddhists...but I think it is one of the most important texts that we have.' That's his quote.

KV: So not taken seriously by *academic* Buddhists? What's an *academic* Buddhist?

CN: A professor of Religious Studies who is writing papers on Buddhism, that sort of thing.

KV: But not necessarily practicing.

CN: Not necessarily practicing.

KV: That doesn't surprise me then, actually. Because if they're not practicing, then why would it be particularly special? Because it is all about practice.

CN: Well, so, you've just answered the first part of this question, which is simply: Do you agree?

KV: Do I agree?

CN: Yes, with what Professor Hallisey said, that the *Maṅgala Sutta* is not taken seriously by academic Buddhists.

KV: If they're not practicing the *Dharma*, then it's not taken seriously. I do agree with him. But if they are practicing, they probably are taking it seriously.

CN: And here's the second part of the question: 'Do you think that the *sutta* is similarly overlooked by practitioners and their teachers?'

KV: Hmm. Well it is interesting, isn't it? Because we definitely have knowledge of it our tradition, we do study it. But I wouldn't say it's the most important teaching that we follow, no. I don't know why, because it's such a succinct *sutta*.

CN: And that's the third part of the question – if yes, *why* do you think it's overlooked?

KV: I think because we've got so many other sources that we use, particularly in our tradition. But I can only speak for my own. I don't know what happens in other traditions. I think we, our tradition, we're strongly influenced by Bhante, and the things that interested him were the things he did seminars on. I mean, he did do a seminar on the *Maṅgala Sutta* so he must have felt it was an important *sutta*. But, you know, he's also done seminars on the *White Lotus Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra*, more the Mahāyāna aspect, I think. I think he was more influenced by the Mahāyāna and the Vajrayāna than the Theravādan. It was not so much more influence, but it was more conducive to him, I think, because he was also a poet, and he loved reading these *suttas*.

[42:55-43:21 Digression about esoteric texts.]

CN: What I'm gleaning is that for your Order, that there are so many *suttas*, so many teachings that you have to choose from, and this is one of many. And it's not just one of many from a particular

tradition, that you have this rich infusion from Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna. So it's really one of quite a lot.

KV: Yeah, it's one of quite a lot. It's one of many teachings, yeah.

CN: So if we think about what obstacles or challenges – this is particular to the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* – what obstacles or challenges do you see to the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* being taught more to Western practitioners?

KV: Hmmm. That's interesting, isn't it? Because I think Western practitioners are more interested in learning about meditation. That's my observation over the years of teaching at centres. They come because they want to learn to meditate. And so they're interested in things like the *Satipaṭṭhāna* and the *Anapanasati* and suttas like that. Or if they're of a more Mahāyāna bent, they want to learn about visualisation and that kind of meditation practice. So you don't often get people coming to a Buddhist centre – not our centres, anyway – interested in the *Dharma*. They're coming to learn to meditate, mostly. And mostly people are coming because they're stressed out, and they want to get a bit of peace, and they think, 'Meditation – yeah!' Or their doctor has recommended it. And now of course there's this big, huge secular mindfulness thing that's happening all over the West. And I think, I mean I think it's a good thing that's happening, but... it's not the *Dharma*. It's only one aspect of the *Dharma*. I mean, I do it myself, I teach secular mindfulness stuff, for pain management, chronic pain management. But again, it misses... the *Dharma* isn't in there. Well, obviously mindfulness is Dharmic, and *metta* is Dharmic. But there's no ethical basis for this secular material. People are coming for relief from pain. That's why they come.

CN: And as you say, it is *part* of the *Dharma*, but it's one part.

KV: It's only one part, yeah.

CN: It's being taken in isolation from the other parts.

KV: Yeah, and although I think it's good that it's actually getting out there into the mainstream, it's not the full thing. It's not the full Monty. But then, you know, most people wouldn't be that interested in the *Dharma*, I don't think. As you say, it's a challenging path. And what are they interested in? They're more interested in materialism. I think that's the religion of the West, or maybe even the religion of the world. The most successful religion ever – materialism.

CN: Mmm.

KV: Mmm. I don't think there are that many folk out there who really have a yearning to go beyond just the material. Which is what the *Dharma*... the *Dharma* really addresses that whole question, you know, what is life for? It's not just about going to the shops.

CN: So the obstacles would be: one, there's this low level of interest in developing the whole *sīla* aspect, and at the same time, there's this real engagement with this quite superficial level of existence that's focused on materialism that's seductive and that locks people in?

KV: And I mean our economies are totally dependent on it. We've structured our economies around it. So no wonder.

CN: Right, because it's being reinforced all the time.

KV: All the time. Advertising... wherever you go, you just can't get away from it. Unless you're off on solitary retreat somewhere, out of sight of any digital thing, or visual advert, or you turn your phone off when you go on retreat.

[49:00-51:25 Digression about the seductiveness of materialism, advertising, etc.]

CN: So we've got one more substantive question, but it's quite a simple one. And it's just to put these two things on a scale of one to ten. So on a scale of one to ten, how useful do you think the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta* is right now in teaching Western practitioners? And how useful could it be?

KV: So is one low and ten high?

CN: Yes.

KV: Well, I think currently it isn't being used, so I'd say a two or three. But could it be? Well, it could be. But I think it would be difficult to make it more relevant.

CN: So in light of those challenges...?

KV: It's quite a big challenge, I would think, to make that *sutta* more relevant. Even though, as you say, it's a really good *sutta*. But there are hundreds and thousands of *suttas*.

CN: So if you were to pin a number on it, whereabouts would you put that?

KV: How useful? I mean, actually I think it is a useful *sutta*, but I don't think it's being used, so I don't quite know how...

CN: Well, that's why I split the question in two. The first part is how it *is* used, and the second is really speaking to its potential.

KV: Yeah, I think it's got potential, definitely. So the first one, probably about two, and the second one, I would say - if it was used properly, you could go right up to ten with it. It's a complete teaching.

CN: Yeah. Moderated, of course, by the challenges you're talking about?

KV: Oh, yeah, blimey. *Big* challenges. Just have to change the whole of society, and its drivers, which of course are craving and aversion, which the Buddha saw really clearly.

[53:50-55:45 Digression about advertising and intoxication.]

CN: So we're at the end of the questions, and the last one is: Is there anything you'd like to add?

KV: Hmmm. Well, it's made me interested to go back and read the seminar again, just to see what Bhante had to say about it. Because it's so long ago since I read it that I don't remember all the things the Bhante brought out from it. But I think that made me curious. So I'll be going on freebuddhistaudio and getting the text and seeing what he said.

(Closing with short personal discussion and thanks.)

Interview 7. Thanissara

(Linda Mary Weinberg)

Dhamma and Meditation Teacher

Sacred Mountain Sangha

Sebastopol, California

and Claralynn Nunamaker, University of South Wales student, MA Buddhist Studies

Llanover, Wales

Via e-mail

Date: 17-12-18

CN: How do you currently engage with the *Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta*? (Aware of it, read it, chant it, teach it occasionally, teach it regularly, translate it, etc.).

TW: I teach with my husband and teaching partner, Kittisaro, so some of my responses reflect that. It is one of the chants that we use on retreats we teach. We often chant it at the opening of a retreat in Pāli, alongside other *parittas* – blessing and protection chants. We also teach retreat participants to chant it in English. I draw from the text when teaching, occasionally using the whole text, and sometimes quoting directly from the Pāli with English translation, or refer to the English directly.

CN: Do you use the MMS in your own teaching? If yes, how and how often?

TW: I haven't taught it that systematically but will draw from some of the stanzas. The principles stated in the MMS I draw on frequently, probably every retreat, and I've taught many retreats each year for over 30 years.

CN: What aspect(s) of the MMS do you find most interesting, relative to your own practice and/or teaching?

TW: I draw students' attention to the opening of the *Sutta*; that the Buddha taught it in response a request from a *deva*, or angelic being. This is something I remark on, to illustrate a world view that is different from the Western secular view, which tends to reduce the teachings to a rational philosophy, editing out Buddhist cosmology, and the personal and collective practice and expression of devotion, and faith.

As we use the practice of chanting as part of our teaching frame, we draw from the stanza on 'honouring those/ that worthy of honour' in support the practice of chanting, which expresses the devotion and faith needed, to the Triple Jewel, the process of insight, the power of realization and the development of the heart for inner freedom. We also use that stanza to underline the importance of recitation (chanting) as a way to connect with these spiritual powers, and with the lineage.

I also point to how the *sutta* names the importance of not only hearing the *Dharma* but also discussing the *Dharma* as a vital support. I also draw on the centrality of the four truths, and the

importance of the realisation of *Nibbana* leading on to, in the steps of the *sutta*, the maturing of the practice, which, although in contact with the world, enables the 'mind/heart to remain unmoved'. Basically, it's clearly a graduated teaching, so each aspect is important, but the foci I've just mentioned are the dominant ones I tend to draw on.

CN: Thinking of the framework of *sīla-samādhi-pañña*, how do you balance your own teaching?

TW: When leading a classical Buddhist meditation retreat, we tend to build the frame of the retreat in a graduated way around the 3 aspects of the path as mentioned in the question. In a retreat setting, there is probably 15% focus on *sīla*/ 35% focus on *samādhi*/ 50% focus on *pañña*.

CN: In what ways do you currently teach *sīla* practice? Do you use 'cornerstone' practices or texts?

TW: As I am teaching lay people, I both teach and go through the ceremony of the 5 precepts. I teach *sīla* as the foundation, as both an internal support for *samādhi*, for the lessening of unwholesome *karma-vipāka*, and also for the maintenance of inner psychological wellbeing. The *sutta* on the five great gifts of the precepts (and three great gifts of the refuges), that offer freedom from fear, hostility and oppression to self and other, give a very positive approach to *sīla*. AN 8.39; IV 245-47.

CN: In terms of teaching practitioners (monastics or laity), how would you describe current use of the MMS in the East? In the West?

TW: I don't know about the East so much, but I would imagine it is used a lot as a teaching frame, explicitly and implicitly. Certainly it is one of the primary *paritta* chants, and many school children may even be familiar with it, as well as adults of course. The initial focus of the *sutta* is shaped by traditional cultural values, for example of filial piety, While care of kin is universal, this value is far less stated in the Western transmission of the *Dharma*. Also, while many of the individual stanzas of the wisdom insights in the *sutta* are taught in the West, they are done so implicitly but not so much in context of the MMS. For the most part, I don't hear many Western teachers refer to the MMS.

CN: In a conversation (on Vimeo) with Venerable Anālayo, Professor Hallisey of the Harvard Divinity School said, '...the *Maṅgala Sutta* is not taken seriously by academic Buddhists...but I think it is one of the most important texts that we have.' Do you agree? Do you think it is similarly overlooked by Buddhist practitioners and their teachers? If yes, why do you think it is overlooked?

TW: That's interesting. I think the MMS contains the essence of the path in a very practical and accessible teaching frame. So I would not agree with the academic take on it. Though they may mean they don't think it is attributable to the Buddha's exact words perhaps, Or that it wasn't taught to a *deva*, that it was a put together text post the Buddha's *parinibbāna*? I don't know, I'm not an academic.

As a practitioner. the principles in the MMS are used all the time in the transmission of the *Dharma*, but as mentioned, not so much directly quoting from the MMS itself in the West.

CN: What obstacles or challenges do you see to the MMS being taught more to Western practitioners?

TW: In the heightened awareness of inequality due to systemic oppression, I am aware that the assumptions the text makes - that it's easy to 'live in suitable places' to have 'access to both parents', to be 'ample in learning', to have 'training in craftsman's skills', to be 'safe wherever you go', etc. - are very tricky. It brings up the larger issue of *kamma-vipāka* and how that is understood and lands when teaching those who have been historically oppressed by colonialism, white supremacy, by patriarchy, or predator capitalism for example. Of course, the sexist language is tricky: 'craftsman', 'cherishing wife and children' (we use 'cherishing family'). Of course, that would not have been a concern 2,600 years ago, but these days you have to take into account cultural and psychological translation when teaching the *Dharma*, not just the literal written word. Also, given we are in the sixth mass extinction and that the environment and human civilization are threatened with collapse, these days it's important to also apply the *Dharma* to the political struggles we are in.

CN: On a scale of 1-10, how useful do you think the MMS is right now in teaching Western practitioners? And how useful could it be (on a scale of 1-10)?

TW: Right now: 8 (but I don't have any idea how to assess who is teaching what).

Could be useful in the West: 9 - I think it is a very useful frame, though I like to think of integrating and maturing through the graduated steps of the MMS as more cyclical than a progressive hierarchy of insights.

If there was some cultural translation (not just a literal translation), then, like all solid *Dhamma* teachings, which this one is, it is a wonderful guide as it spans from the practical, everyday behaviour, the relational field, all the way through to the most sublime. I like, too, that it doesn't end in the realisation of *nibbāna*, but encourages that it's possible to be in contact with the world, engage it, without the heart being shaken or overwhelmed. It also offers hope that the practice of this *sutta* brings safety, blessings, and victory, which is very motivating and soothing for the heart.

CN: Is there anything you'd like to add?

(no response)

Appendix D: Translations

Set 1. Pāli versions (PTS edition) in English translation

Inclusions:

Version 1

Title: *The Sources of Happiness*;

Location: Pāli Canon, Sn 258-269;

Source: Khuddaka Pāṭha, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (1870, New Series, Volume IV);

Translator: Childers, R.

Version 2

Title: *Blessings*;

Location: Pāli Canon, Sn 258-269;

Source: Soni (Rev. Khantipalo) (2004: 17-19);

Translator: Soni, R.

Version 3

Title: *Discourse on Happiness*;

Location: Pāli Canon, Sn 258-269;

Source: Hanh (2007, 31-34);

Translator: Hanh, T.

Version 4

Title: *Highest Blessings*;

Location: Pāli Canon, Sn 258-269;

Source: Amaravati Buddhist Monastery (2015, 46-47);

Translator: Unspecified (Thai Forest Tradition of Ajahn Chah).

Version 1

The Sources Of Happiness

Thus I have heard. On a certain day dwelt Buddha at Çravasti, at the Jetavana monastery, in the garden of Anáthapi.n.daka. And when the night was far advanced a certain radiant celestial being, illuminating the whole of Jetavana, approached the Blessed One, and saluted him and stood aside. And standing aside addressed him with this verse,-

V1. Many gods and men, yearning after good, have held divers things to be blessings; say thou, what is the greatest blessing.

V2. Buddha: To serve wise men and not serve fools, to give honour to whom honour is due, this is the greatest blessing.

V3. To dwell in a pleasant land, to have done good deeds in a former existence, to have a soul filled with right desires, this is the greatest blessing.

V4. Much knowledge and much science, the discipline of a well trained mind, and a word well spoken, this is the greatest blessing.

V5. To succour father and mother, to cherish wife and child, to follow a peaceful calling, this is the greatest blessing.

V6. To give alms, to live religiously, to give help to relatives, to do blameless deeds, this is the greatest blessing,

V7. To cease and abstain from sin, to eschew strong drink, to be diligent in good deeds, this is the greatest blessing.

V8. Reverence and lowliness, contentment and gratitude, to receive religious teaching at due seasons, this is the greatest blessing.

V9. To be long-suffering and meek, to associate with the priests of Buddha, to hold religious discourse at due seasons, this is the greatest blessing.

V10. Temperance and chastity, discernment of the four great truths, the prospect of Nirvána, this is the greatest blessing.

V11. The soul of one unshaken by the changes of this life, a soul inaccessible to sorrow, passionless, secure, this is the greatest blessing.

V12. They that do these things are invincible on every side, on every side they walk in safety, yea, theirs is the greatest blessing.

Version 2

(Untitled)

Thus have I heard:

Once while the Blessed One was staying in the vicinity of Sāvatti, in the Jeta Grove, in Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery, a certain deity, whose surpassing brilliance and beauty illumined the entire Jeta Grove, late one night came to the presence of the Blessed One; having come to him and offered profound salutations he stood on one side and spoke to him reverently in the following verse:

V1. Many deities and human beings
Have pondered what are blessings,
Which they hope will bring them safety:
Declare to them, Sir, the Highest Blessing.
(To this the Blessed One replied):

V2. With fools no company keeping,
With the wise ever consorting,
To the worthy homage paying:
This, the Highest Blessing.

V3. Congenial place to dwell,
In the past merits making,
One's self directed well:
This, the Highest Blessing.

V4. Ample learning, in crafts ability,
With a well-trained disciplining,
Well-spoken words, civility:
This, the Highest Blessing.

V5. Mother, father well supporting,
Wife and children duly cherishing,
Types of work unconflicting:
This, the Highest Blessing.

V6. Acts of giving, righteous living,
Relatives and kin supporting,
Actions blameless then pursuing:
This, the Highest Blessing.

V7. Avoiding evil and abstaining,
From besotting drinks refraining,
Diligence in Dhamma doing:
This, the Highest Blessing.

V8. Right reverence and humility
Contentment and a grateful bearing,
Hearing Dhamma when it's timely:
This, the Highest Blessing.

V9. Patience, meekness when corrected,
Seeing monks and then discussing
About the Dhamma when it's timely:
This, the Highest Blessing.

V10. Self-restraint and holy life,
All the Noble Truths in-seeing,
Realization of Nibbaana:
This, the Highest Blessing.

V11. Though touched by worldly circumstances,
Never his mind is wavering,
Sorrowless, stainless and secure:

This, the Highest Blessing.

V12. Since by acting in this way,
They are everywhere unvanquished,
And everywhere they go in safety:
Theirs, the Highest Blessings.

Here ends the Discourse on Blessings.

Version 3

Discourse on Happiness

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when the Lord was living in the vicinity of Savatthi at the Anathapindika Monastery in the Jeta Grove. Late at night, a deva appeared whose light and beauty made the whole Jeta Grove shine radiantly. After paying respects to the Buddha, the deva asked him a question in the form of a verse:

V1. Many gods and men are eager to know
What are the greatest blessings
Which bring about a peaceful and happy life.
Please, Tathagata, will you teach us?"
(This is the Buddha's answer):

V2. Not to be associated with the foolish ones,
To live in the company of wise people,
Honoring those who are worth honoring —
This is the greatest happiness.

V3. To live in a good environment,
To have planted good seeds,
And to realize that you are on the right path —
This is the greatest happiness.

V4. To have a chance to learn and grow,
To be skillful in your profession or craft,
Practicing the precepts and loving speech —
This is the greatest happiness.

V5. To be able to serve and support your parents,
To cherish your own family,
To have a vocation that brings you joy —
This is the greatest happiness.

V6. To live honestly, generous in giving,
To offer support to relatives and friends,

Living a life of blameless conduct —
This is the greatest happiness.

V7. To avoid unwholesome actions,
Not caught by alcoholism or drugs,
And to be diligent in doing good things —
This is the greatest happiness.

V8. To be humble and polite in manner,
To be grateful and content with a simple life,
Not missing the occasion to learn the Dharma —
This is the greatest happiness.

V9. To persevere and be open to change,
To have regular contact with monks and nuns,
And to fully participate in Dharma discussions —
This is the greatest happiness.

V10. To live diligently and attentively,
To perceive the Noble Truths,
And to realize nirvana —
This is the greatest happiness.

V11. To live in the world
With your heart undisturbed by the world,
With all sorrows ended, dwelling in peace —
This is the greatest happiness.

V12. For the one who accomplishes this
Is unvanquished wherever she goes;
Always he is safe and happy —
Happiness lives within oneself.

Version 4

The Highest Blessings

Thus have I heard that the Blessed One
Was staying at Sāvattthī,
Residing at the Jeta's Grove
In Anāthapiṇḍika's Park.

Then in the dark of the night, a radiant deva
Illuminated all Jeta's Grove.
She bowed down low before the Blessed One
Then standing to one side she said:

V1. Devas are concerned for happiness
And ever long for peace.
The same is true for humankind.
What then are the highest blessings?

V2. Avoiding those of foolish ways,
Associating with the wise,
And honouring those worthy of honour.
These are the highest blessings.

V3. Living in places of suitable kinds,
With the fruits of past good deeds
And guided by the rightful way
These are the highest blessings.

V4. Accomplished in learning and craftsman's skills,
With discipline, highly trained,
And speech that is true and pleasant to hear.
These are the highest blessings.

V5. Providing for mother and father's support
And cherishing family,
And ways of work that harm no being,
These are the highest blessings.

V6. Generosity and a righteous life,
Offering help to relatives and kin,
And acting in ways that leave no blame.
These are the highest blessings.

V7. Steadfast in restraint, and shunning evil ways,
Avoiding intoxicants that dull the mind,
And heedfulness in all things that arise.
These are the highest blessings.

V8. Respectfulness and being of humble ways,
Contentment and gratitude,
And hearing the Dhamma frequently taught.
These are the highest blessings.

V9. Patience and willingness to accept one's faults,
Seeing venerated seekers of the truth,
And sharing often the words of Dhamma.
These are the highest blessings.

V10. Ardent, committed to the Holy Life,
Seeing for oneself the Noble Truths
And the realization of Nibbāna.
These are the highest blessings.

V11. Although in contact with the world,
Unshaken the mind remains
Beyond all sorrow, spotless, secure.
These are the highest blessings.

V12. They who live by following this path
Know victory wherever they go,
And every place for them is safe.
These are the highest blessings.

Set 2. Tibetan versions

Inclusions:

Version 5

Title: 'In the Indian language: *Maha-Mangala Sutra*. In the Bod language: *Bkra-çis chex-p o-i mdo* Worship of the three noble jewels' (Feer, 1883, 224);

Informal title given by Feer: *Version du Sud*;

Location: Tibetan Canon, *Mdo XXX*;

Source: Feer (1883, 224-227);

Translators: Feer, L. (1883) into French; Rebours-Smith, J. (2018) from French into English.

Version 6

Title: 'In the Indian language: *Deva Pariprecha Mangala Praha*. In the Bod (tibetan) language: *lhas jus-pai okra-cis kyi ts'igs-su ocad-pa*' (Feer, 1883, 224);

Informal title given by Feer: *Version du Nord*;

Location: Tibetan Canon, *Rgyud XIX*;

Source: Feer (1883, 224-227);

Translators: Feer, L. (1883) into French; Rebours-Smith, J. (2018) from French into English.

Version 5

<p>French</p> <p><i>Version du Sud</i></p> <p>Grand Sutra de Bénédiction</p> <p>Voici le discours que j'ai entendu une fois: Baghavat résidait à Cravasti à Jeta-vana dans le Jardin d'Anatbapindada. Or, à une certaine heure de la nuit, plusieurs dieux, ayant fait resplendir Jetnana par une clarté formée de rayons de diverses couleurs, se rendirent au lieu où était Baghavat. Quand ils y furent arrivés, ils l'adorèrent et se tinrent à une petite distance. Ensuite, les deux prononcèrent plusieurs stances pour interroger Bhagavat:</p> <p>Plusieurs dieux et hommes ont médité sur les bénédictions: il n'est aucun doute sur les bénédictions. Nous te prions de dire quelle est la bénédiction suprême.</p> <p>V1. Le dieu des dieux dit: Vaincre tous les vices, procurer le bien de tout le monde, voilà les bénédictions que je proclame,</p> <p>V2. Ne pas fréquenter les ignorants, fréquenter les savants, rendre l'honneur à qui est digne de l'honneur; c'est là une suprême bénédiction.</p> <p>V3. Grâce à des mérites acquis antérieurement, habiter un pays convenable, faire pour soi-même un vœu excellent, c'est là une suprême bénédiction.</p> <p>V4. La vérité, l'habileté de main, une bonne instruction sur la pratique de la discipline, et (le don de) prononcer de bonnes paroles, c'est là une suprême bénédiction.</p>	<p>English</p> <p><i>Southern Version</i></p> <p>Great Sutra of Blessings</p> <p>Here is the speech I once heard, Baghavat was living in Sravasti in Jeta-vana in Ansbapindada's garden. While at some hour of the night, several gods having dazzled Jetnana with a light made from rays of many colours made for the place where Baghavat was. When they arrived there, they worshipped him and stayed a little distance away. Standing there these gods uttered several stanzas to question Baghavat. Several gods and men have meditated on the blessings. A doubt arose on the blessings, We pray you tell us what is the supreme blessing.</p> <p>V1. The god of gods said: Defeat all vices, provide everyone's well-being, here are the blessings that I proclaim.</p> <p>V2. Not to mingle with ignorants, mingle with those who are knowledgeable, honour those worthy of honour ; that is a supreme blessing.</p> <p>V3. Thanks to previously acquired merits, live in a respectable country, make for oneself an excellent wish, that is a supreme blessing.</p> <p>V4. The truth, skills with hands, a good instruction on the practice of discipline, and (the gift of) uttering good words, that is a supreme blessing.</p>
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<p>V5. Rendre coeur a ses pere et mere, prendre soin de sa femmo et de ses enfants; nu rien faire d'une facon desordonnee; c'est la une supreme benediction.</p> <p>V6. Donner, pratiqor la loi, prendre soin de tous ses parents, ne rien fairo de reprehensible; c'est la une supreme benediction.</p> <p>V7. Eviter de so plaire dans le mal, eviter les liqueurs enivrantea, etre vigilant dans l'accomplissement de chaque devoir; c'est la une supreme benediction.</p> <p>V8. Ne pas marchander le respect a son guru; (savoir) témoigner de la reconnaissance; ententre la loi en temps opportun; c'est la une supreme benediction.</p> <p>V9. Supporter patiemment les mauvaises paroles, rendre visite aux cramanas, tenir des discours aur la loi en temps op-portun; c'est la une supreme benediction.</p> <p>V10. Les mortifications, la purete, la vue des verites sublimes, la manifestation du Nirvāna; c'est la une supreme benediction.</p> <p>V11. Conserver sa fermete d'esprit quand on questionne surles lois du monde; être inaccessible au chagrin, patient, c'est la une supreme benediction.</p>	<p>V5. Honour one's father and mother, take care of one's wife and children; do nothing in a disorderly manner; that is a supreme blessing.</p> <p>V6. To give and practice the law, to take care of all of one's parents, do nothing objectionable; that is an excellent blessing.</p> <p>V7. Refrain from finding pleasure in evil, avoid intoxicating spirits, be vigilant in the execution of each duty; that is a supreme blessing.</p> <p>V8. Not bargaining respect to one's guru; (knowing how to) express gratitude; hearing the law in appropriate time; that is a supreme blessing.</p> <p>V9. Patiently coping with bad words, visiting the Samanas, making speeches about the law in appropriate times; that is a supreme blessing.</p> <p>V10. The mortifications, the purity, the sight of sublime truths, the arising of Nirvana; that is a supreme blessing.</p> <p>V11. Conserving one's firm spirit when we question the laws of the world; being unreachable to sadness, patient, that is a supreme blessing.</p>
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<p>V12. Ceux qui parlent de cette façon sont vertueux en toutes circonstances; en toutes circonstances, ils marchent dans le calme; c'est là une suprême bénédiction. Ainsi parla Bhagavat. - Les dieux se réjouirent du discours de Bhagavat.</p>	<p>V12. Those who speak in this way are virtuous in all circumstances; in all circumstances they walk calmly; it is for them a supreme blessing. Thus spoke Bhagavat - the gods rejoiced from Bhagavat's speech.</p>
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Version 6

<p>French</p> <p><i>Version du Nord</i></p> <p>Stances de Bénédiction</p> <p>En français: Stances de bénédiction prononcées à la demande d'un dieu.</p> <p>Adoration aux tris joyaux.</p> <p>Celui que nul o'a pu vainere, le parfait Buddha, le protecteur, résidait on un certain lieu, quant un dieu vint au grand heros présenter ses hommages et adresser ses paroles;</p> <p>Sur la question de savoir comment on approche du but de la vertu,</p> <p>les dieux et les hommes sont partagés.</p> <p>Il s'agit de proclamer les bénédictions; disquelle est la bénédiction parfaite.</p> <p>V1. Bhagavat dit:</p> <p>Sur la question de avoir comment ou approche du but de la vertu,</p> <p>les dieux et les hommes sont partagés.</p> <p>Sil'on vent énonoer les bénédictions, voici les bénédictions qu'il faut énoncer.</p> <p>V2. Un bon pays, des compagnons excellents, des mérites acquis antérieurement, un esprit disposé pour le bien; c'est là une bénédiction parfaite.</p> <p>V3. Pratiquer le don, parler avec beaucoup de donseur;</p> <p>avoir la véritable intelligence du but parfaitement pur;</p> <p>avoir une conduite conforme à ceile des hommes moraux;</p> <p>c'est là une bénédiction parfaite.</p>	<p>English</p> <p><i>Northern Version</i></p> <p>Blessing Stanzas</p> <p>In English: stanzas of worship uttered at the request of a god.</p> <p>Worship of the three jewels.</p> <p>Him whom none could defeat, the perfect Buddha, the protector lived in some place when a god came to the great hero to render homage to him and utter those words;</p> <p>On the question of how to come closer to the goal of virtue,</p> <p>Gods and men are divided.</p> <p>One had to proclaim blessings;</p> <p>Tell what is the perfect blessing.</p> <p>V1. Bhagavat says:</p> <p>On the question of knowing how one comes closer to the goal of virtue,</p> <p>gods and men are divided.</p> <p>If one wishes to state the blessings, here are the blessings that must be stated.</p> <p>V2. A good country, excellent companions, previously acquired merits, a spirit intending to do good; that is a perfect blessing.</p> <p>V3. Practice the act of giving, speak very softly; have the true intelligence of the perfectly pure goal;</p> <p>behave in a way that matches the behaviour of moral men;</p> <p>that is a perfect blessing.</p>
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<p>V4. Ne pas fréquenter les ignorants, fréquenter les savants; rendre hommage à ceux qui en sont dignes; c'est là une bénédiction parfaite.</p> <p>V5. Traiter avec respect ses père et mère; marcher dans lo calme et la pureté; éprouver la commisération pour tous les êtres; c'est là une bénédiction parfaite.</p> <p>V6. S'ahateoir de tout acte entaché de péché, s'appliquer aux actions vertoeuseux, être vigilant, constamment sage; c'est là une bénédiction parfaite.</p> <p>V7. L'absence d'orgueil et de hauteur, le contentement, une vie unie, une exécution constamment régulière de tout ce qu'on fait; c'est là une bénédiction parfaite.</p> <p>V8. Pratiquer le don et aussi être patient, vivre à la façon des Aryas, entendre la loi dans le temps convenable; c'est là une bénédiction parfaite.</p> <p>V9. N'être point paresseux, écouter beaucoup, êtro bien éclairé sur la loi, conséquemment n'avoir point de trouble dans l'esprit; c'est là une bénédiction parfaite.</p>	<p>V4. Not mingle with ignorants, mingle with scholars; pay homage to those worthy of it; that is a perfect blessing.</p> <p>V5. Treat with respect one's father and mother; walk in calmness and purity; feeling empathy for all beings; that is a perfect blessing.</p> <p>V6. Abstain from all acts tainted with sin, to do virtuous deeds with care, to be vigilant, constantly wise; that is a perfect blessing.</p> <p>V7. The absence of pride and haughtiness, contentment, a unified life, an execution constantly regular of all that one does; that is a perfect blessing.</p> <p>V8. Practicing the act of giving and also being patient, living in the ways of the Aryas, hearing the law in a convenient time; that is a perfect blessing.</p> <p>V9. Not being lazy, listening a lot, being well clear about the law, consequently not having any trouble in the mind; that is a perfect blessing.</p>
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<p>V10. Lorsque à l'égard de tous les êtres animés, on développe l'esprit de charité, qu'on est exempt de trouble au plus haut degré; c'est là une bénédiction parfaite.</p> <p>V11. Si, à l'endroit des vérités sublimes, ou purifie parfaitement l'oeil de la haute science, et qu'on s'applique à recevoir la moralité; c'est là une bénédiction parfaite.</p> <p>V12. La vue de la vérité sublime, la développement de la pureté, l'obtention du Nirvāna, c'est là une bénédiction parfaite.</p> <p>V13. Si à la convoitise, à la haine, à l'égarment on sait se soustraire complètement, et qu'aucun trouble ne vienne obscurcir la science; c'est là une bénédiction parfaite.</p> <p>V14. Si, bien qu'ébranlé par les lois du monde, on garde néanmoins un esprit inébranlable, et qu'on reste sans tache et sans chagrin, c'est là une bénédiction parfaite.</p> <p>V15. Qu'est-ce que la force qui vient à tel et tel de sa naissance? Il a des bénédictions à l'avenant. Mais celui qui ne prie que le sage a des bénédictions à toujours (12).</p>	<p>V10. When towards all animated beings, one develops a charitable spirit; when we are exempt from trouble at the highest level; that is a perfect blessing.</p> <p>V11. If in the place of sublime truths, one purifies perfectly the eye of the high science, and we carefully receive morality; that is a perfect blessing.</p> <p>V12. The sight of the sublime truth, the development of purity, the reaching of Nirvana, that is a perfect blessing.</p> <p>V13. If to coveting, to hate, to getting lost one knows to completely remove oneself, and no trouble come to darken the science; That is a perfect blessing.</p> <p>V14. If though shaken by the laws of the world, one nevertheless keeps an unshakable spirit, and remains without stain and sadness, that is a perfect blessing.</p> <p>V15. What is the force that comes to so and so at their birth? He has blessings accordingly. But he who only praises the wise Has blessings forever.</p>
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Set 3. Chinese versions, Taishō

Inclusions:

Version 7

Title: *Jíxiáng pǐn* (吉祥品)

Location: Chinese Canon, Taishō IV, *Fǎjù Jīng (Dhammapada)* (法句經), T.IV.211, 574c29;

Source: http://ntireader.org/taisho/t0210_02.html

Translator: untranslated primary source.

Version 8

Title: *Jíxiáng pǐn* (吉祥品)

Location: Chinese Canon, Taishō IV, *Fǎjù Jīng (Dharmapada)* (法句譬喻經), T.IV.210, 608c14-609b15;

Source: http://ntireader.org/taisho/t0211_04.html

Translator: untranslated primary source.

Version 9

Title: *Good Fortune*

Location: Chinese Canon, Taishō IV, *Fǎjù Jīng (Dharmapada)* (法句譬喻經) T.IV.210, 608c14-609b15 in English translation;

Source: Beal, S. (1878: 174-176);

Translator: Beal, S.

Version 7

吉祥品法句經第三九十有九章

[0574c29] 吉祥品者，修己之術，去惡就善，終厚景福。

- | | | | |
|-------------|--------|--------|--------|
| V1. 佛尊過諸天， | 如來常現義， | 有梵志道士， | 來問何吉祥？ |
| V2. 於是佛愍傷， | 為說真有要， | 已信樂正法， | 是為最吉祥； |
| V3. 若不從天人， | 希望求僥倖， | 亦不禱祠神， | 是為最吉祥； |
| V4. 友賢擇善居， | 常先為福德， | 勅身從真正， | 是為最吉祥； |
| V5. 去惡從就善， | 避酒知自節， | 不姪于女色， | 是為最吉祥； |
| V6. 多聞如戒行， | 法律精進學， | 修己無所爭， | 是為最吉祥； |
| V7. 居孝事父母， | 治家養妻子， | 不為空之行， | 是為最吉祥； |
| V8. 不慢不自大， | 知足念反復， | 以時誦習經， | 是為最吉祥； |
| V9. 所聞常以忍， | 樂欲見沙門， | 每講輒聽受， | 是為最吉祥； |
| V10. 持齋修梵行， | 常欲見賢聖， | 依附明智者， | 是為最吉祥； |
| V11. 以信有道德， | 正意向無疑， | 欲脫三惡道， | 是為最吉祥； |
| V12. 等心行布施， | 奉諸得道者， | 亦敬諸天人， | 是為最吉祥； |
| V13. 常欲離貪欲， | 愚癡瞋恚意， | 能習誠道見， | 是為最吉祥； |
| V14. 若以棄非務， | 能勤修道用， | 常事於可事， | 是為最吉祥； |
| V15. 一切為天下， | 建立大慈意， | 修仁安眾生， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V16. 欲求吉祥福， | 當信敬於佛； | 欲求吉祥福， | 當聞法句義； |
| V17. 欲求吉祥福， | 當供養眾僧。 | 戒具清淨者， | 是為最吉祥； |
| V18. 智者居世間， | 常習吉祥行， | 自致成慧見， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V19. 梵志聞佛教， | 心中大歡喜， | 即前禮佛足， | 歸命佛法眾。 |

Version 8

法句譬喻經吉祥品第三十九

[0608c14] 昔佛在羅閱祇耆闍崛山中為天人龍鬼轉三乘法輪。時山南恒水岸邊有尼捷梵志，先出耆舊博達多知，德向五通明識古今，所養門徒有五百人，教化指授，皆悉通達天文地理星宿人情，無不瞻察，觀略內外，吉凶禍福豐儉出沒，皆包知之。梵志弟子先佛所行應當得道，欸自相將至水岸邊，屏坐論語自共相問：「世間諸國人民所行，以何等事為世吉祥？」徒等不了，往到師所為師作禮，叉手白言：「弟子等學久所學已達，不聞諸國以何為吉祥？」尼捷告曰：「善哉問也！閻浮利地有十六大國，八萬四千小國，諸國各有吉祥，或金或銀，水精琉璃、明月神珠、象馬車輿、玉女珊瑚、珂貝妓樂、鳳凰孔雀，或以日月星辰、寶瓶四華、梵志道士，此是諸國之所好喜祥瑞應，若當見是稱善無量，此是瑞應國之吉祥。」諸弟子曰：「寧可更有殊特吉祥，於身有益、終生天上？」尼捷答曰：「先師以來未有過此，書籍不載。」諸弟子曰：「近聞釋種出家為道，端坐六年降魔得佛，三達無礙，試共往問，所知博採何如大師？」師徒弟子五百餘人，經涉山路往到佛所，為佛作禮坐梵志位，叉手長跪，白佛世尊曰：「諸國吉祥所好如此，不審更有勝是者不？」佛告梵志：「如卿所論世間之事，順則吉祥反則凶禍，不能令人濟神度苦。如我所聞吉祥之法，行者得福永離三界，自致泥洹。」

[0609a11] 於是世尊而作頌曰：

- | | | | |
|-------------|--------|--------|---------|
| 「V1. 佛尊過諸天， | 如來常現義， | 有梵志道士， | 來問何吉祥？ |
| V2. 於是佛愍傷， | 為說真有要， | 已信樂正法， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V3. 亦不從天人， | 希望求僥倖， | 亦不禱神祠， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V4. 友賢擇善居， | 常先為福德， | 勅身承貞正， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V5. 去惡從就善， | 避酒知自節， | 不姪於女色， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V6. 多聞如戒行， | 法律精進學， | 修己無所爭， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V7. 居孝事父母， | 治家養妻子， | 不為空乏行， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V8. 不慢不自大， | 知足念反覆， | 以時誦習經， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V9. 所聞常欲忍， | 樂欲見沙門， | 每講輒聽受， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V10. 持齋修梵行， | 常欲見賢明， | 依附明智者， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V11. 已信有道德， | 正意向無疑， | 欲脫三惡道， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V12. 等心行布施， | 奉諸得道者， | 亦敬諸天人， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V13. 常欲離貪姪， | 愚癡瞋恚意， | 能習成道見， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V14. 若以棄非務， | 能勤修道用， | 常事於可事， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V15. 一切為天下， | 建立大慈意， | 修人安眾生， | 是為最吉祥。 |
| V16. 智者居世間， | 常習吉祥行， | 自致成慧見， | 是為最吉祥。」 |

[0609b15] 梵志師徒聞佛說偈，欣然意解，甚大歡喜，前白佛言：「甚妙世尊！世所希有，由來迷惑未及[門@視]明。唯願世尊！矜愍濟度，願身自歸佛法三尊，得作沙門冀在下行。」佛言：「大善！善來比丘！」即成沙門，內思安般逮得應真。聽者無數，皆得法眼。

Version 9

Good Fortune

When Buddha was residing in the Gridhrakūta Mountain, near Rājagriha, preaching for the benefit of Devas and men, there was residing on the banks of the Ganges a certain Brahmachārin, belonging to the Nirgrantha sect, of considerable age and vast wisdom. This man, with his 500 followers, devoted himself to the study of the stars and heavenly bodies, with a view to predict lucky and unlucky events. On one occasion, just before Buddha had commenced his public ministry, this man, with his disciples, were discussing the question of “good fortune,” as they sat by the river's side; and after explaining in what good fortune consisted, so far as it concerned the happiness of a prince in his worldly empire, the question arose as to what “good fortune” was when considered in reference to the future. After much discussion, they resolved to go to the Bōdhi Tree, where the World-honoured had just overcome Māra, and put this question to him. What is the secret of real “good fortune”? On which the Master opened his mouth and repeated these lines :—

- V1. Buddha, the Honoured above all gods, Tathāgata, the ever-wise and intelligent, is asked by the learned sages of the Brahmachārin sect in what consists the enjoyment of good fortune.
- V2. On this Buddha, the compassionate, for their sake enunciates true wisdom. He who has faith, and delights in the true Law, this man is fortunate above all others.
- V3. He who looks for good luck neither from gods or sacrifices to spirits (but from himself) is truly fortunate.
- V4. A friend of the virtuous, and holding with the righteous, always making the consideration of virtue his first aim, keeping his body in strict obedience to the rules of propriety, this man is fortunate indeed!
- V5. Avoiding bad people and following the good, giving up wine, and using strict moderation in all personal gratification, not lusting after female beauty, this man is indeed a fortunate one.
- V6. Ever anxious to listen to the rules of right conduct, persevering in the study of the Law and Rules of Discipline (Dharma and Vinaya), self-restrained and without offence, this man is fortunate above all.
- V7. If a householder, then caring; for his father and mother, and looking after the welfare of his house, and properly fostering his wife and child, not occupying himself in vain and useless avocations, this man is indeed fortunate.
- V8. Not giving way to idleness or self-honour, knowing the character of moderation (as to himself), and thoughtful of his friends, at proper times reading the Scriptures and practising (himself in them), this man is truly fortunate.

V9. Patiently continuing in the way of duty (of what he hears he ought to do), rejoicing to see a religious person (Shaman), and ever inviting such an one to instruct him in religion, this man is happy.

V10. Observing the religious seasons (fasts), and during such seasons using strict self-abstinence, always desiring to see the virtuous and holy man, placing his confidence in the instruction of the enlightened, this man is fortunate.

V11. Once convinced of the happiness of religion (Bōdhi), then with upright heart never swerving from his faith, desiring above all things to escape the three evil ways (of birth), this man is truly happy.

V12. With equal mind, devoting himself to charity, honouring all the wise alike, and paying respect to the Divine Spirits, this man is indeed happy.

V13. Always anxious to get rid of sensual desires and covetousness, to escape from delusive thoughts, ignorance, and anger, ever constant in the pursuit of true wisdom, this man is indeed fortunate.

V14. Even in discarding the evil using no extraordinary appearance of effort, but steadily persevering in the practice of what is right, always acting as he ought to act, this man is fortunate indeed.

V15. Full of love for all things in the world⁵, practising virtue in order to benefit others, this man alone is happy.

V16. The wise man dwelling in the world, pursuing this line of fortunate behaviour with constancy, ever pressing onwards to complete what knowledge he has gained, this is a happy man indeed.”

The Brahmachārin, having heard the instruction of Buddha, felt his heart full of joy; immediately he arose and worshipped, and took refuge in Buddha, the Law, and the Church.

The Nirgrantha and his followers, having heard these words, were very glad, and after due worship they obtained permission to become Shamans, and soon obtained inward illumination (the eyes of the Law).

The Mrgrantha and his followers, having heard these words, were very glad, and after due worship they obtained permission to become Shamans, and soon obtained inward illumination (the eyes of the Law).

⁵ Beal has omitted the second line of this quatrain, 建立大慈意, meaning ‘establishing great kindness’.

Set 4. Chinese versions, Pāli (non-Taishō)

Inclusions:

Version 10

Title: *Jíxiáng Jīng* (吉祥经)(*Mangala Sutta*);

Translator: Dhammavaro, B. (2005).

Version 11

Title: *JiXiang Jīng* (吉祥經)(*Mangala Sutta*);

Translator: Hanh, T. (2016).

Version 10

吉祥经 (*Mangala Sutta*)

如是我闻,一时,佛在舍卫国祇树给孤独园,于深夜时,有一金光四射天神,莅临佛所,遍照祇园,行近佛前,顶礼佛足,立于一边,以偈而问佛: 诸天与世人,企求诸善德,思维吉祥义,祈佛为示知:

- V1. 尔时佛慈愍, 天神与人众, 开示胜吉祥, 以偈而答曰:
- V2. 不亲近愚人, 应亲近智者, 敬礼有德者, 此为最吉祥。
- V3. 家居择善处, 往昔修善业, 决心行正道, 此为最吉祥。
- V4. 广学善工巧, 戒学具律仪, 真实柔和语, 此为最吉祥。
- V5. 孝顺于父母, 护养妻与子, 正命维生计, 此为最吉祥。
- V6. 布施修十善, 扶助诸亲族, 不作诸罪业, 此为最吉祥。
- V7. 禁绝造诸恶, 不染麻醉物, 精勤修善法, 此为最吉祥。
- V8. 恭敬与谦逊, 知足常感恩, 适时听闻法, 此为最吉祥。
- V9. 忍辱易受教, 诣沙门僧伽, 请教于佛法, 此为最吉祥。
- V10. 善御修梵行, 彻了四圣谛, 亲证悟涅槃, 此为最吉祥。
- V11. 虽接触世法, 清静无忧恼, 安稳离垢染, 此为最吉祥。
- V12. 人天如是修, 能胜诸怨敌, 随处皆安乐, 此为最吉祥。

Version 11

吉祥經

這是我聽佛陀說的。當時佛陀住在王舍城附近的祇樹給孤獨園。那天在深夜時，有一位天人出現來探訪佛陀，天人的毫光和莊嚴照亮整個祇園。向佛陀行禮後，天人以一首偈頌向佛提問：

V1. 天和人渴望，知何謂吉祥，以安寧生活，請佛陀指導。

這是佛的回答：

V2. 遠離愚惡者，親近賢善人，尊敬應敬者，是為最吉祥。

V3. 生活環境好，播下美善種，走在正道上，是為最吉祥。

V4. 有學習機會，知修持戒律，能講說愛語，是為最吉祥。

V5. 能供養父母，懂愛護家庭，有合適行業，是為最吉祥。

V6. 正直和布施，助眷屬親朋，行事無瑕疵，是為最吉祥。

V7. 避免做惡事，不沉迷上癮，精勤行善事，是為最吉祥。

V8. 懂謙恭禮待，知足和感恩，不錯過修學，是為最吉祥。

V9. 堅持常行善，親近善知識，學習和分享，是為最吉祥。

V10. 精勤和清醒，學微妙真理，親証入涅槃，是為最吉祥。

V11. 合眾於世間，心不曾動搖，煩惱盡安然，是為最吉祥。

V12. 誰如此生活，時時也安全，處處也穩健，自身之吉祥。

Appendix E: Scansion of the MMS

Source: <https://www.ancient-buddhist-texts.net/Buddhist-Texts/X1-Catubhanavarapali/01-Pathamaka-07.htm> (Anadajoti Bhikkhu, 2006).

Line types are underlined and in parentheses. All lines are *pathyā* except as otherwise noted.

Evaṃ me sutam:

Ekam samayaṃ bhagavā sāvattḥiyaṃ viharati jetavane anāthapiṇḍikassa ārāme. Atha kho aññatarā devatā abhikkantāya rattiyā, abhikkantavaṇṇā kevalakappaṃ jetavanaṃ obhāsetvā, yena bhagavā tenupasaṅkami, upasaṅkamitvā bhagavantam abhivādetvā ekam-antaṃ aṭṭhāsi. Ekam-antaṃ tṭhitā kho sā devatā bhagavantam gāthāya ajjhabhāsi:

V1. u---|u---||-u-u|u-u- (*pathyā*)

'bahū devā manussā ca ~ maṅgalāni acintayum

--u-|,---||-u-u|u-u- (*mavipula*)

ākaṅkhamānā sotthānam: ~ brūhi maṅgalam-uttamaṃ.

V2. u-u|u---||-u-u|u-u-

'asevanā ca bālānam, ~ paṇḍitānañ-ca sevānā

--u-|u---||-u-u|u-u-

pūjā ca pūjanīyānam: ~ etaṃ maṅgalam-uttamaṃ.

V3. u-u|u---||-u-u|u-u-

paṭirūpadesavāso ca, ~ pubbe ca katapuññatā

--u-|u-u-||-u-u|u-u- (*navipula*)

attasammāpaṇidhi ca: ~ etaṃ maṅgalam-uttamaṃ.

V4. u-u|u---||-u-u|u-u-

bāhusaccañ-ca sippañ-ca, ~ vinayo ca susikkhito,

u-u|u---||-u-u|u-u-

subhāsītā ca yā vācā: ~ etaṃ maṅgalam-uttamaṃ.

V5. u-u|u---||-u-u|u-u-

mātāpitu⁰³-upaṭṭhānam, ~ puttadārassa saṅgaho,

u-u|u---||-u-u|u-u-

anākulā ca kammantā: ~ etaṃ maṅgalam-uttamaṃ.

V6. u-u|u---||-u-u|u-u-

dānañ-ca dhammacarīyā ca, ~ ñātakānañ-ca saṅgaho,

~--|~---||---|~--

anavajjāni kammāni: ~ etaṃ maṅgalam-uttamaṃ.

V7. ~--|~---||---|~-- (savipula)

ārati virati pāpā, ~ majjapānā ca saññamo,

~--|~---||---|~--

appamādo ca dhammesu: ~ etaṃ maṅgalam-uttamaṃ.

V8. ~--|~---||---|~--

gāravo ca nivāto ca, ~ santuṭṭhī ca kataññutā,

~--|~---||---|~-- (navipula)

kālena dhammasavaṇaṃ: ~ etaṃ maṅgalam-uttamaṃ.

V9. ~--|~---||---|~-- (Anutthubha)

khantī ca sovacassatā, ~ samañānañ-ca dassanaṃ,

~--|~---||---|~--

kālena dhammasākacchā: ~ etaṃ maṅgalam-uttamaṃ.

V10. ~--|~---||---|~--

tapo ca brahmacariyañ-ca, ~ ariyasaccānadassanaṃ,

~--|~---||---|~--

nibbānasacchikiriyā ca: ~ etaṃ maṅgalam-uttamaṃ.

V11. ~--|~---||---|~--

phuṭṭhassa lokadhammehi, ~ cittaṃ yassa na kampati,

~--|~---||---|~--

asokaṃ virajaṃ khemaṃ: ~ etaṃ maṅgalam-uttamaṃ.

V12. ~--|~---||---|~--

etādisāni katvāna, ~ sabbattha-m-aparājītā,

~--|~---||---|~-- (mavipula)

sabbattha sotthiṃ gacchanti: ~ taṃ tesāṃ maṅgalam-uttama'-ti.

Appendix F: The thirty-eight *maṅgalas*

Translated by Soni (Rev. Khantipalo)(2018: 67-69), in Pāli and English.

1. *Asevanā ca bālānaṃ*: Not associating with fools.
2. *Pañḍitānaṃ ca sevanā*: Associating with the wise.
3. *Pūjā ca pūjanīyānaṃ*: Reverencing those worthy of respect.
4. *Patirūpadesaṃ*: Residence in a suitable locality.
5. *Pubbe ca katapuññatā*: Having made merit in the past.
6. *Attasammāpaṇidhi*: One's mind properly directed.
7. *Bahusaccaṃ*: Profound learning.
8. *Bahusippaṃ*: Proficiency in one's work.
9. *Vinayo ca susikkhito*: Well-learned moral discipline
10. *Subhāsītā ca yā vācā*: Gracious kindly speech.
11. *Mātāpitu upatṭhānaṃ*: Giving support to parents.
12. *Puttadārassa saṅgaho*: Cherishing wife and children.
13. *Anākulā ca kammantā*: Business pursuits, peaceful and free from conflicts.
14. *Dāna*: Acts of giving.
15. *Dhammacariyā*: Conduct according to Dhamma.
16. *Nātakānaṃ ca saṅgaho*: Helping one's relatives.
17. *Anavajjāni kammāni*: Blameless actions.
18. *Ārati pāpā*: shunning evil.
19. *Virati pāpā*: Abstaining from evil.
20. *Majjapānā ca saññaṃ*: Refraining from intoxicants.
21. *Appamādo ca dhammesu*: Diligence in practice of what is Dhamma.
22. *Gāraṇa*: Reverence.
23. *Nivāto*: Humility.
24. *Santuṭṭhi*: Contentment.
25. *Kataññutā*: Gratefulness.
26. *Kālena dhammasavanaṃ*: Timely hearing of the Dhamma
27. *Khanti*: Patience
28. *Sovacassatā*: Meekness when corrected.
29. *Samaṇānaṃ ca dassanaṃ*: Meeting (seeing) monks.
30. *Kālena dhammasākacchā*: Discussing the Dhamma at the proper time.
31. *Tapo*: Energetic self-restraint.
32. *Brahmacariyā*: Holy and chaste life.
33. *Ariyasaccāna dassanaṃ*: Insight into the Noble Truths.

34. *Nibbāna sacchikiriā*: Realization of Nibbāna.

35. *Phuṭṭhassa lokadhammehi cittaṃ yassa na kampaṭi*: A mind unshaken by the ups and downs of life.

36. *Asokaṃ*: Freedom from sorrow.

37. *Virajaṃ*: Freedom from defilements of passion.

38. *Khemaṃ*: Perfect security.

Appendix G: Soni's classification

The arrangement of the thirty-eight *maṅgalas* in the schema developed by Soni (Rev. Khantipalo)(2006: 74-75).

I: Preparation

1. Laying the Right Foundation through
 - a. Suitable associations: M1, M2, M3
 - b. A good place to live: M4
 - c. Past merits: M5
2. Right Planning: M6
3. Right Training: M7, M8, M9, M10

II: Wayfaring in the World:

1. Basic Responsibilities: M11, M12, M13
2. Social Obligations: M14, M15, M16, M17
3. Self-Protection: M18, M19, M20
4. Conservation of Personal Progress: M21
5. Cultivation of Higher Qualities: M22, M23, M24, M25, M26

III: Spiritual Growth

1. Spiritual Eligibility: M27, M28
2. Contact with Religious Life: M29, M30
3. On the Path: M31, M32, M33, M34
4. The Fruit: M35, M36, M37, M38

IV: The Conclusion of Life: The Summum Bonum:

1. Perfect invincibility of the person
2. Durable happiness.

Appendix H: Bhikkhu Bodhi's Groundplan of the *Maṅgala Sutta*

Source: https://bodhimonastery.org/courses/Sn/2Mangala_Outline.pdf

Bodhi (2005)

The Ground Plan of the Mangala Sutta with its Thirty-Eight Blessings

Verse

v. 1. The opening inquiry: What is truly auspicious, truly a blessing?

v. 2. *Orientation*: cultivating the conditions for discretion

(1) Not to associate with the foolish (*asevanā bālānaṃ*)

(2) To associate with the wise (*paṇḍitīnaṃ sevanā*)

(3) To venerate those worthy of veneration (*pūjā pūjaniyānaṃ*)

v. 3. *Establishing secure foundations*: the inner and outer requisites for success in life

(4) Dwelling in a suitable locality (*paṭirūpadesaṃvāsa*)

(5) Merits done in the past (*pubbe katapuññatā*)

(6) To set oneself on the right course (right resolution: *attasammāpaṇidhi*)

v. 4. *Preparations*: training oneself for success in life

(7) A well-rounded education (abundant learning: *bāhusacca*)

(8) Learning a craft or profession (*sippa*)

(9) A code of discipline that has been well trained in (*vinaya susikkhita*)

(10) Well-spoken speech (*subhāsītā vācā*)

vv. 5, 6: *Leading a virtuous life in the world*:

v.5. *Fulfilling family responsibilities*

(11) Supporting one's mother and father (*mātāpitu-upaṭṭhāna*)

(12) Maintaining a wife (husband) and children (*puttadārasaṅgaha*)

(13) A harmless occupation (*anākulā kammantā*)

v.6. *Becoming a pillar of society*

(14) Generosity (*dāna*)

(15) Dutiful conduct (righteous conduct: *dhammacariyā*)

(16) Helping of relatives and friends (*ñātakānaṃ saṅgaha*)

(17) Blameless actions (*anavajjāni kammāni*)

v.7. *Personal ethics*: A life of moral integrity

(18) Ceasing from evil (*āraṭi pāpā*)

(19) Abstaining from evil (*virati pāpā*)

(20) Abstention from intoxicating drinks (*majjapānā saṃyama*)

(21) Diligence in wholesome practices (*appamādo dhammesu*)

vv.8, 9. *Developing a spiritual life: Cultivating inner virtues*

- (22) Reverence (*gāraṇa*)
- (23) Humility (*nivāta*)
- (24) Contentment (*santuṭṭhi*)
- (25) Gratitude (*kataññutā*)
- (26) Timely hearing of the Dhamma (*kālena dhammassavana*)
- (27) Patience (*khanti*)
- (28) Being amenable to advice (*sovacassatā*)
- (29) Seeing renunciants (*samañānaṃ dassanaṃ*)
- (30) Timely discussions on the Dhamma (*kālena dhammasākacchā*)

v.10. *The ascent towards realization: practicing and attaining the world-transcending Dhamma*

- (31) Austerity (*tapā*)
- (32) Celibacy (the holy life: *brahmacariya*)
- (33) Seeing the Noble Truths (*ariyasaccānadassana*)
- (34) Realization of Nirvana (*nibbānasacchikiriyā*)

v.11. *Fulfillment: Embodying the world-transcending Dhamma in the world*

- (35) A mind unshaken by changing worldly conditions (*phuṭṭhassa lokadhammehi cittaṃ yassa na kampaṭi*)
- (36) A mind that is sorrowless (*asokaṃ*)
- (37) A mind that is passionless, “dust-free” (*virajaṃ*)
- (38) A mind that is secure (*khemaṃ*)

v.12. *Conclusion: These are victorious everywhere; they attain security everywhere (sabbattha-m-apārājītā, sabbattha sotthiṃ gacchanti).*

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