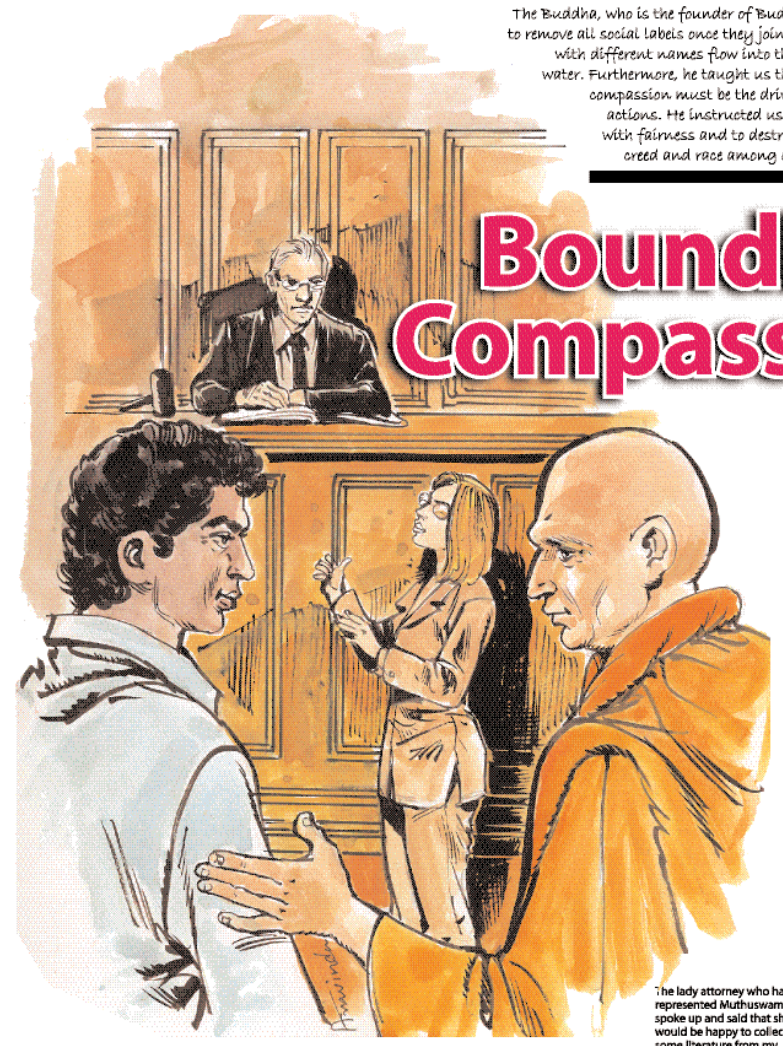


The telephone rang once, twice, and then thrice. When I answered, I heard an unfamiliar voice at the other end. He spoke in Sinhalese, but didn't sound fluent in the language. Then I realized he was a Sri Lankan Tamil gentleman. Muthuswami had won a work permit when the United States Government had made a certain number of green cards available through a lottery system. But when he arrived in Los Angeles, United States immigration refused him entry to the country because he did not have a sponsor or money to support himself. He refused to go back to Sri Lanka, as he had arrived legally, so the only alternative was to send him to a detention camp. Muthuswami was in a quandary. He had called a man named Joseph, whose telephone number had been given to him by one of his friends in Sri Lanka. Joseph was not in a position to help him, so Joseph gave him my telephone number, thinking that I might be able to do something for him. I collected the necessary information and then called two Tamil gentlemen who are well-known as social workers in their community in Southern California. They listened to Muthuswami's story and promised to call me back. After waiting one day and not hearing from them, I decided to give them a call. Unfortunately, they expressed no interest whatsoever in Muthuswami's case. I decided to contact a close Tamil friend of mine to get his opinion. He encouraged me to help Muthuswami, whom he did not know personally, and he even said that he would pay legal fees if necessary. I contacted a lawyer I knew who worked with immigration cases and handed the case over to her. She asked if I would be willing to sponsor Muthuswami and, if so, to give her an appropriate letter. Even though I didn't know Muthuswami, all I saw was a man in need of my help, so I obliged. Two days later the attorney called me and said that I had to appear in court to vouch for Muthuswami and tell the judge that I was willing to be responsible for him. When the appointed day came, I met the attorney and Muthuswami in the courtroom. This was the first time I had actually seen him in person, even though I couldn't yet speak to him. The authorities escorted him to the defense table; he was being treated like a prisoner. When I looked at Muthuswami, I could see at once that my instincts about him had been correct. His face told me that he was an honest man with a good



Boundless Compassion

The Buddha, who is the founder of Buddhism, told his disciples to remove all social labels once they join the order. Many rivers with different names flow into the ocean as one body of water. Furthermore, he taught us that wisdom and compassion must be the driving forces behind all our actions. He instructed us to treat all living beings with fairness and to destroy the barriers of class, creed and race among all the peoples of the world.

forgive those of my own people who turned their backs on me. The compassion you showed to me is what I must now show to them. Thank you! The following are the Buddha's words on loving kindness.

Skilled in good, wishing to attain a state of calm, so should one behave: able, upright, perfectly upright, open-minded, gentle, free from pride.

Contented, easily supportable, with few duties, of right livelihood; controlled in senses, discreet, reserved, not greedily attached to family.

One should not commit a slight wrong, that wise persons might censure, that there be happiness and security; may all beings be happy-minded.

Whatever beings there are, timid, strong and all other, long, or huge, average, short, or large;

Seen or unseen, living near or far, born or coming to birth; may all beings be happy-minded.

Let one not deceive another, nor despise anyone anywhere; neither in anger nor ill will should one wish another harm.

As a mother would risk her own life to protect her only child, so should one, to all living beings cultivate a boundless heart.

Let one's love pervade the whole world, without any obstructions, above, below and across, free of obstruction, enmity, hostility.

Standing, walking, sitting, or lying down; whenever awake, one should develop mindfulness, as this is the highest abode.

Not falling into error, virtuous and endowed with insight; giving up attachment to sense desires, one is not again subject to birth.

heart and that he would, in fact, be someone who could fit into United States society and make a positive contribution. During the cross-examination the immigration lawyer asked me whether I was a Sinhalese or a Tamil. I replied that I was a Buddhist monk. He wanted me to answer his question, but I gave him the same answer again. This annoyed the man, so he complained to the judge that the witness was not answering the question.

The judge addressed me directly and said, "You will please answer the question directly, sir." I replied, "I am a Sinhalese. But since I am a Buddhist monk, I am not tied to any race." "Explain that statement," demanded the judge. "The Buddha, who is the founder of Buddhism, told his disciples to remove all social labels once they join the order. Many rivers with different names flow into the ocean as one body of water. Furthermore, he

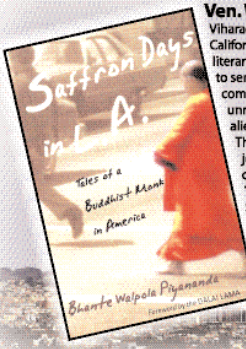
taught us that wisdom and compassion must be the driving forces behind all our actions. He instructed us to treat all living beings with fairness and to destroy the barriers of class, creed and race among all the peoples of the world." The judge listened carefully and asked whether I was able to financially support Muthuswami. "Yes, Your Honour, I am able and willing to support him," I replied. The judge considered the matter for a few moments,

and then ordered Muthuswami to be handed over to me. After the judge concluded the case, he asked me if I would stay behind for a few minutes so he could talk to me personally. The judge approached me and said, "I was very impressed by your answers on the witness stand today. Day after day people stand before me who are victims of ideologies involving race or religion. They find themselves separated from others because of strong cultural beliefs that sometimes even lead to violence. What you spoke about today was all about inclusion and unity. This is a very important message for the world." I replied, "In the Metta Sutta, or Sutta of Loving Kindness, the Buddha talks about a mother protecting her only child. He instructs us to protect every other being in a similar way. It is the way of Buddhism to demonstrate compassion and loving kindness for everyone, regardless of who or what they are or have been." "You have made me very curious to learn more about the Buddhist religion. Where can I get more information?" asked the judge eagerly.

The lady attorney who had represented Muthuswami spoke up and said that she would be happy to collect some literature from my temple and deliver it to the judge herself. He thanked me and said he looked forward to receiving it. I returned to the temple with Muthuswami. I decided that I must make him feel comfortable at my temple, so I named him Raja, warning him to keep his identity as a Tamil a secret. Unfortunately, there is still a great deal of tension between the various ethnic factions in Sri Lanka. In a few weeks I was able to find him a job. He eventually moved into his own place and saved enough money to bring his family over from Sri Lanka. He is now leading a comfortable life in Los Angeles. Later I learned that Muthuswami was the descendant of an Indian tea picker. I reflected that perhaps it was his ancestry that was looked down upon by the Tamil social workers who showed no signs of compassion. In truth, Muthuswami is a gem of a person who is ever grateful to me for helping him out when no one else would. He is a Hindu and his wife is a Catholic, but both of them want their children to follow the compassionate path of the Buddha. He often says to me when he comes to visit, "If it weren't for you, Shante, I would never be able to

Saffron Days in L.A.

Tales of a Buddhist Monk in America 4



Ven. Walpola Piyananda Thera, Founder and Viharadhipati of Dhamma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles, California shares his experience of life in America in his maiden literary work Saffron days in Los Angeles, which we are privileged to serialise every Saturday beginning today. With calm and compassion characteristic of a Buddha putra he dispassionately unravels the trials and travails of the life of a Buddhist monk in an alien country captivating the hearts and minds of the reader. The stories in the collection reveal the complex, contradictory, joyous, painful, intriguing and inspiring aspects of human condition and the power of true compassion. **This story tells how Ven. Piyananda helped a fellow Sri Lankan from the upcountry Tamil community to find a new life in the United States.**

Next week
The Disciple who Jumped over the cliff