

Khin Maung NYO

## WHERE DO YOU PUT YOUR HEART?

*Just as a mother would protect her only son,  
at the risk of her life, like so,  
Let the boundless rays of pure-heart radiate  
towards all beings in the entire world.*

-Buddha 363- 483 BC  
( From Mitta Sutra)

(1)

I came from upper Myanmar.

There was famine over there. No rain for many years. So I came down to Yangon and ended up working in the jetty. Then I worked on a ferry ship which sailed to and fro in the delta area .There I met a pretty girl who sold rice on the ship. She was a little bit plum but very healthy looking. One day when she was climbing on board she fell down into the river.

"Oh. God" Somebody shouted.

Without thinking I jumped over board into the river just to rescue her forgetting that I could not swim. Luckily I could hold her in the water; she could swim and we both were saved (the exact words should be that I was saved by her.). Her name was *Mya Mya*.

We became very good friends. *Mya Mya* lived with her parents in a village called *Phone-Daw-Pyi*. When the owner of the ship sold it to another merchant, I quit the job and moved to work in *Phone-Daw-Pyi*. The people in the village lived mainly on fishing. So I also became a fisher man. *Mya Mya* and I got married soon after. I moved to her house.

*Mya Mya* taught me how to swim and how to fish.

But villagers taught me how to drink.

All the men in the village drank good wine during the evening. They said "Fishing is a tough job and after returning from the sea one or two drinks will make you healthy."

In a few months my father-in-law and mother-in-law died one after another.

After the funeral my wife said to me . "Dear, please do not go out in the evening .If you leave the house, I am alone and I feel so lonely"

"But I want to drink"

"OK. I will make you drink at home"

Everyday she bought me some liquor which was cheap and plenty.

Every evening after coming back from the sea, I usually drank alone, but sometimes with friends in my home. My wife noticed that I consumed more and more and drinking span increased from morning till night.

One night my wife asked me "Why do you drink too much."  
I said "I like it"  
She looked a bit sad and she told me, "I am pregnant."  
"What"  
She repeated. I kissed her womb. "It will be a beautiful son"  
"I hope so," said the wife. She continued, "Please, promise me not to drink  
any more"  
I promised her and from that day on I totally stopped drinking.

(2)

After nine months, she indeed, gave birth to a beautiful son. I heard the baby  
cried. The cried was loud and robust .But soon after the mother died. Just before she  
died she said, " Promise me to look after my baby"

I promised her to raise him into a good life. She died on my hand.

" Mya Mya "

I tried to hide my grieve but I broke out and called out her name

The whole world seemed to be blackout.

After her funeral I broke my promise. Everyday I drank from morning till night.  
The pain was too much for me. After a week or so I became very weak and then I  
remember my son.

I shouted, "Where is my son." Nobody cared to response. I went to the  
neighbors. Their faces seemed to dislike me. .

One woman came out of her house and said "You are a drunkard. Why do  
want your child for?"

I said "I am his father"

"But you cannot even look after yourself" she said scornfully.

"I love my son,"

"May be. But we cannot give the child to a drunkard, who could not even look  
after himself. "

They may be right. But my son was my son.

Then an elderly came in.

"If you stop drinking and behave yourself we will allow you to see your son  
and later we will make an arrangement to live him with you. However your son is only  
two weeks old and we have decided to keep him a little longer .We have a lady who  
has just given birth to a child and she agreed to share her milk to the poor little child  
with her own child. "

"May I see him now?"

"Of course, if you are sober"

"That you need not to worry. I will give up drinking and work for the  
motherless son"

They took me to the other side of the village where a lady kept my child in a  
little bed together with her own son. I could recognize him easily. He was fair and  
smiled like her mother.

I whispered softly, " Mya Mya , I promise you to raise our son "  
I wished I could keep my promise this time.

(3)

I was not drinking anymore and worked very hard. I got enough money for both of us. I repaired the house, which was a bamboo hut liked most of the houses in the village. The lady looked after my son and wanted to adopt my baby.

My son used to think that the lady was her mother.

At the age of three my son came to live with me. He occasionally went to visit to his adopted mother.

When he reached to the age of four he seemed to be matured for his age. He usually waited for me whenever I came back from the sea after fishing. When he was five I made him a novice at the monastery in our village. I donated all my money for my son's *shin-pyu* ceremony. On the day of occasion, all the people from the village were invited to have the meals in the monastery. Everybody was very happy. When the noviation was completed the monks blessed us for the deed. I could not control my tears, I cried out my wife's name.. Lots of women of the village also could not control their tears. *Mya Mya* will be very proud to have our son's *shin-pyu* ceremony and we wished her for the best where ever she may be in her next life..

After 7 days of novice (monk-hood) my son came back home. He seemed to be grown up a bit more. I told him that he would have to go to school next year in June.

In Myanmar New Year celebration is held in April all over the country. It is one of the most outstanding festivals and people throw water to each other It is called water festival or *Thingyan*.. I took my son to *Nga-pu-taw*, which is a small town, where they celebrate a big water festival.

When we returned back from the trip I bought some clothes and school uniforms for my son. I also bought a school bag and some books for him to prepare for the lessons in advance.

When we arrived back to the village, my son always made his school bag ready and played to go the mock school.

(4)

Every year, by the end of April and the beginning of May, we usually have strong wind and high tide. During this season, all the fishermen understood that it is very important to listen to the radio for the weather reports. We noticed that mangrove forest was disappearing rapidly and the tides came in faster than ever.

On the first day of May a storm warning was announced on the radio. It said that there was a low pressure area forming in the Bay of Bengal, which could move to southern Ayeyarwaddy, Rakhine and Yangon division. Our boats were no good to go

in the rough sea, so we stop fishing. We put our boats in a small creek next to the village.

The next day we heard from the radio that the cyclone was named Nargis and it was moving slowly towards the north. The wind will be strong and sea will be rough.

We never think that a cyclone could be as destructive as a Tornado or a Sunami and could do a lot of damage on us. Nobody in the village ever experienced big storm like Nargis. We were thinking that it might come and it might go, and without much damage.

It started at about 5 o'clock in the evenings of second of May.

We heard the wind roared in with a loud noise. The houses were shaking. Coconut trees were swaying. We closed doors and windows of our houses, Then we heard somebody in the street shouting..

"Run, run"

"Water is rushing up"

I looked out of the house and saw the water rushed in with a very fast rate. With that kind of rate the village will be soon under water. The wind blew harder making more noise.

I put my son on my shoulder. He took his school bag and clung my neck with his both hands. I was a strong fisherman, and never afraid of anything. I was quite confident that I can make my way to the other side of the village, where there was the monastery and the high level.

But as soon as I put my feet into the water I noticed that I could not move easily. It was real difficult to make even a step. The gushing of water, growling of wind and the pushing of rain made me swayed from one side to another.

I struggled to make my step bit by bit. By then I saw a boat approaching us. There were only a few people on board. I could barely see their faces, but .I could make a guess them from their gestures that they were my friends." It was lucky of me, "I thought.

"Let us in" I shouted. They stopped and help my son on board.

"Son, *Thar Htet* holds the hands tightly." I warned him.

He nodded and got on board. Just before he could settle on the boat, a great wave rushed in and hit the boat with an enormous force. I could hear people screamed and I lost control of myself and I was drawn. After struggling to get to the surface for many times I was lucky to grip a big plastic container and I tightened it to my hand tied it with my shirt.

Suddenly I remember my son.

"Son..*Thar Htet*."

I shouted. Nobody could hear me. Then a wave carried me furiously and I was hit by something big moving in the water. I was totally blackout.

(5)

It was a bright sunlight hitting to my eyes. I woke up in great pain. My body was aching and my head was hurting. I could feel some blood dripping from my head. I actually was on a tree branch .I got down from the tree very carefully. The wind was still blowing strong I felt the mud under the tree. There was a lot of dirt. The place was really awful. I was very thirsty. Where can I get the drinking water? I moved around when I saw a woman came down from the tree.

" Daw Shwe" I exclaimed.

' Kya Gyee." She happily greeted me. We were both from the same village  
*Phone-daw- pyi.*

But after looking at Daw Shwe, I bust into laughter.

" Why are you laughing, Kya Gyee?" She asked me

I was pointing at her and said "You have no clothe"

"Goodness, neither have you Kya Gyee"

Yes. I had not a piece of cloth either.

"We should do something"

She went to get some straw and rolled over to make a rope. She then wrapped the straw rope around her body.

"Not bad at all"

I imitated Daw Shwe. I got the straw myself and made a rope. I actually need a small one to cover me up as I only need to cover the lower part of my body.

"Let's go home"

"Do you know where we are now?"

"No idea. But we will meet some people on our way"

"You are right. It won't be very far"

"OK. Let's move. But I am thirsty"

"Me too"

"Let's walk and look for some water"

After walking a while we saw some broken coconut trees on the ground. I quickly plucked some coconuts and slowly removed the outer part using a sharp stone. I managed to make a small hole on the nut and shared it with Daw Shwe. I also managed to get a hole on another nut. We were really feeling good after having coconut water.

"Good,We will eat some kernels"

We pick up some more coconuts and hit with big stone. It was not very easy. But at last we got some opened.

"Not bad at all"

"I don't like this place" she said. It is because we can see some dead bodies of human and animals on the shore.

We had gained enough strength to move on. We walked towards the hill which may not be very far from this place. There is a small wood near the hill. As we went into the wood we met 5 or 6 people there.

(6)

They seem to be searching some things. As soon as they found us, they welcomed us.

"You must be Nargis survivors"

We nodded. They gave us a bottle of water and some biscuits.

"We are a searching team for the survivors. We are volunteers. Our team is not well established yet but we can feed 100 people for a week or two."

"Thank you very much. By the way, where are we now?"

"In *Hine Gyi Kyun*"

"What! *Hine Gyi Kyun*?"

"Yes. You are in *Hine Gyi Kyun*."

I was really surprised to know that we were now in *Hine Gyi Kyun*. *Hine Gyi* in fact is an island surrounded by water, situated at the mouth of *Ngawun* river, next to the sea. It is also very far from *Phone-Daw-Pyi* and practically you cannot get there without a strong boat. (May be you might have seen on the movies that a girl went to school from *Kyaut-ka-lat* - next to *Phone-Daw-Pyi*, to *Hine Gyi Kyun* by riding on her motor bike. But it is only the imagination of a movie director who didn't do his homework properly)

"How comes we were in *Hine Gyi Kyun*? Last night we were in *Phone-Daw-Pyi* " No body answered.

The villagers took us to the village where they gave us clothes and shelter. They fed us with a big meal. After we had had our dinner Daw Shwe asked me, "Where is your son?"

"My son? *Thar Htet*? "I exclaimed loudly.

Every body looked at me as though I had gone mad.

"My son, my son! Where are you " I lost my son, "Oh dear."

It was the last time I saw him went on board of a small boat .At that moment a big wave struck us and I was drawn, The wave made us far apart and I was sunk I lost my little boy. How come I am in *Hi Gee Kyun*? I can't live without my son.

You know, he would be going to school in June .He had his school uniform ready. He had his school bag on his shoulder. I promised my wife on her dead bed that I would look after him in a great care. Tears shed out of my eyes and I was not able to eat any more. I went down the street which led to the beach. I sat near the beach for a long time. What should I do? The answer was simple. I should go down to the sea in search of my son. I stood up slowly. At that moment somebody took my arm and said, "Let's drink some local wine and forget the pain you had suffered."

He was a strong man. He took me to a hut where they sold the local wine..

We sat down in the hut and the waiter brought two bottles of rice wine.

I took a bottle and poured it into my mouth. The taste of bitterness and burning went down into my throat.

"These are very good wines." The stranger said as he also was having the wine in a glass for himself. I nodded and agreeing with him. I felt a little bit better. But I

was still very weak. As I poured the wine down my throat to empty the bottle I totally was blackout

I woke up in the next morning and I saw myself on the earthen ground near the liquor hut.

I went into the hut. I saw nobody but plenty of wine bottles. I felt very thirsty, so I took a bottle of wine and drank again. The spirit was really strong and I felt as if I was going to the hell.

I couldn't move. I slept on the ground again.

I did not know how many days I was there in the liquor hut. At last I tried to walk down to the sea beach. I could hear the sea roaring even from a distance. I thought that somebody in the sea was calling me.

"OK. This is it. I will go down into the sea."

But I was very weak. I could barely stand up. I walked slowly to the sea. The sea was full. It must have been a high tide. As I walked to the sea I fell down so many times that I had a number of bruises on my knees and elbows. I got up myself and walked. But at one point I could not get up. I did not know how long I was lying there on the ground. Then an old man in a white dress gave me his hand and said,

"Son, come with me"

I looked him up and asked, "Where to?"

"To a peaceful place"

"Is it the heaven, you want me to take?"

"Of course, son. To the heaven, a peaceful place"

"Gosh. To the heaven, then I must be dead."

"No. You are not dead, son. You are not dead."

"Without dying, how could somebody go to the heaven?"

"We are going there son. Believe me. Come with me to the big pagoda and there, you will get what you want"

"I want to see my son"

"OK. You will see your son when you get there"

(7)

It took a long time to get to the big pagoda. Finally we get into a hut near the big pagoda..

"Where is my son?" I asked the man.

"I will show you if you eat and sleep well with us. You must make yourself sober before you can see your son" said the old man. Some how, I agree with him. He must be a holy man or magician who could get whatever you want and see things what you want to see.

The old man made me eat a bowl of rice with dried fish. I was so tired that I got into a deep sleep, I saw my son who was in the drowning boat ." Father, help me!  
"

I tried to get hold of his little hands. His hands were so slippery that it kept losing all the time. The little boat went far, far away, I couldn't see it any more.

“Son, son” I shouted.

Then I woke up sweating all over. I felt very cold and trembling. The old man came and felt my forehead and said, “You are having a fever. I will get you some medicine”.

He boiled a portion of herbs and made me take the whole lot. It was really bitter and smelly, but I felt much better after that.

I asked the old man “Where is my son”

“Tell me your whole story, so that I can help you to see your son”

I told my whole story about my wife and my son.

The old man listened to me very carefully and said “I am sorry. I will see what I can do for you.”

He then asked me, “Would you promise me not to consume, drink, eat or smoke any of the intoxicated things for the rest of your life.”

“I promise whichever you want as long as I could see my son”

“Another requirement is that you must love all beings. Would you promise me my son?”

“I promise”

“Alright, I will meditate through the night and tell you where to find your son”

I was very happy, thinking that I can rely on this holy man.

The old man went to the pagoda, lit up some candles and sat down in front of the big pagoda.

He sat there the whole night and I laid beside him. I was counting the beads with my heart putting loving kindness on all beings.

“You must love all living beings whether you can see or not.”

“You must love everybody as your own son”

These were Buddha teaching.

When I woke up in the morning, I felt much better.

“We can only have fruits for our breakfast, but for the lunch I will go down to the village to get some rice,” the old man said kindly. I nodded and took some mangoes and bananas that he gave to me. Then I asked him “where can I see my son?”

He said, “It is a bit confusing. You must have more meditation on loving kindness. Can you do that?”

I was upset to hear the negative answer from him. But I must try to do my share of meditation on loving kindness which is meditation to put your heart on all being, living in the universe.

When the holy man came back from the village he brought me some food. I wanted to fetch water from the village well, but the old man told me not to bother as I was still very weak. After meditating for three days the holy man said, “I have met your son.”

“Where? How is he? I asked him with an excited manner.

“Your son already had died. But he will be reincarnated as a paddy bird.”

“Goodness. Why paddy bird?”



“I don’t know. But you see, you can go to the paddy field and work there to talk to your son.”

“How?”

“If you go down to the field and work there, you might meet your son. You can find a farmer there and you can work for him. He will give you food and shelter. Don’t drink any wine as you’d promised. Meditate on loving kindness for all beings.. Your son will come to you. Work hard son.”

I went down to the paddy field and met a farmer. He greeted me and asked me to have some plain tea with him. After talking a while, he agreed to hire me as a worker for the season. He said “We are in short of workers after Nargis”.

Nargis really took away more than two hundred thousand lives, I was told.

“Thanks goodness. I am still alive, “I said to myself.” Now my son becomes a paddy bird. He may be a little one. Anyway he might come and see me.”

Every evening I went out to the paddy field and tried to look for my son. There were so many lovely paddy birds around there. But neither came to me. After four months or so, the holy man came to see me. He said that I had to move to another place.

“Why?”

“I was wrong about your son. He is not a paddy bird. He is reincarnated in a cow and he is now born as a calf.”

“Really, how can I go to see my son?”

“Come along. We will go to the man who is raising the cattle.”

The farmer agreed as the season was over and paddy field was already harvested. He settled my wages and went to the cattle field with the holy man. When we arrived to the cattle field he asked the owner for the job for me as a cattle boy. I was hired and I also got a place to stay there. The old man and I went to see the new born little calf. It is a little cute one. He looked at me as I stroked his back.

I said to the calf, “Son, I am here to be with you and will not leave you again.” My son seemed to be careless, but I dared say that he definitely understood me. Then the old man told me,

“OK. Son. Stay here and work hard. Don’t forget to meditate .I will come back after a month”

I was happy again. Every morning I cleaned the cow shed, milked, and talked to my son. He was a clever one and always liked me around.

The owner of the cattle fed me and gave some money for the work. After a month the holy man came to see me. I was happy that the little calf cared me so much and could have stayed here for my whole life. I sometimes visited to the big pagoda and prayed for the unfortunate ones, whose bodies were left in water, incriminated for months. We need loving kindness for the people all over the world.

It was a day in January; the holy man came in and said to me.

“Son, I was wrong about your son”

“Wrong again!”

“I am sorry son, in this world there are bad spirits and good spirits fighting each other. If the bad spirit won, we got the wrong information. In this evil world bad

spirits are stronger and they usually win, unless we help the good spirit by doing good things, like fasting, meditation on loving kindness etc... These can help the good spirits in a way. Now you have done a lot of meditation on loving kindness I've got the right information about your son."

"What is he this time?"

I asked the holy man with disbelief. How could I believe him as he was going wrong for many times?

"Son, he surely is a boy now. He is now born as a son of a lady in the village. He was born two days ago"

"Which village?"

"A-shay village, next to the big pagoda"

"I know A-shay village. Are you sure holy man?"

"Positive son. But you cannot go and work at the lady's home."

"Why not?"

"Wife and husband might not like the idea that your son is reincarnated there."

"What should I do then?"

"You cannot claim that he is your son. But you can help them by working near to their house. I can arrange you work in a store as an attendant"

So I became a shop attendant in the village store which reminded me about my life on the ferry ship along the delta. It was still fresh in my mind as my wife and I met on board of the ship. The whole story came back into my memory and hurting me as I lost my wife as well as my son. My tears shed out. However I was quite lucky to meet the old man who knew exactly where to find my son.

Every now and then I went to see my re-born son. The couple was surprised to see my great care to their child. I usually brought some gifts with me for the child. I gave toys, clothes and some cheap jewelry, whatever I could afford for the little one. He was lovely and fair that I still had the picture of him in my memory.

"Anyway, he is now having a good live" I thought.

I was working as a shop assistant for more than a month now. I usually visited to the old man and to the pagoda. I am happy, as my reincarnated son was quite near to me.

One day the holy man came to see me. He said bluntly, "Do you believe in reincarnation."

I said "Of course I do"

The old man seemed too confused.

"If the little boy is not your son reincarnated, would you still love him"

"What?" I really was mad, and my body was trembling all along and shaking. I really shouted at him, "You are a liar. A great liar. You wanted me to believe that the paddy bird was my son. Then you said that you went wrong and a calf was my son again. Then you told me that the little boy in the village was my son. Now what do you have in your mind. Do you want to change you story again. I do not want to listen to a word from you."

He sat down real quiet, without saying a word he was gazing outside. In fact I do not want to hear his bull-shift any more. The whole room was very quiet. After sitting quietly a long time, he rose slowly and bid me good bye.

Before leaving the room he said, "Son, you promised me that you might love all beings as your own son. It is loving kindness or "mitta" in Buddhism. When I first met you, you wanted your son back, no more or no less. So I had to made the stories up to relieve you from your pain."

He continued, "In fact, I gave you my hand to get on your feet."

"One should not waste his life longing things he lost. I got an idea and told you to find your reincarnated son in his next life. I am not a god, son. I have no power to know the secret of lives. I created the stories that you can continue to live a good life."

I really was surprised to hear the old man words. He really was a wise man. The old man continued, "Now you are in a good shape my son. You are meditating on loving kindness for all beings. That is to put your heart on all the creatures and you know that too." He paused "Be brave to love every body as your own son"

He left me. I was alone in the house. His words really made me understood my life as a whole. Why should I love only my son? I must love every body's sons. We need to care one another.. After all we are in. the same boat.

After cyclone Nargis, I did not know how to live on..

"Life is not fair" I used to think.

May be it. But no body promise to give you a fare life. Life, you may suffer, you may be getting old (aging) you may be in pain (suffering), you will die in a day. We cannot get away from these events. But we can take care each other .We can love our fellow people. We can love them as our own sons.

The holy man showed me to love the paddy bird and the calf as my own son. To love others especially to love animals may be difficult. But if they are your own son you will love them.

I was told the baby in the village was my son reincarnated. Now I know that whether he was reincarnated or not, it does not matter. I must love him.

Now I am reborn. I know how to live with love in this new world.

And I know where to keep my heart.

Translated from the Burmese by

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