

# **The Lenz Effect**

Finding Spiritual Friendship in the Modern World

A Paper for the Frederick P. Lenz Foundation for American Buddhism

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In the Buddhist canon, a special designation is awarded the archetype of the spiritual friend (*Kalyāṇa-mitta*; Skr. *-mitra*; Tib. *dge ba'i bshes gnyen*). The spiritual friend is someone who motivates us along the Noble Eight-fold Path.<sup>1</sup> It is recounted explicitly in the *Upaddha Sutta* that the *Kalyāṇa-mitta* is an essential factor for progress along the spiritual path. The role can be seen as a teacher, role model, peer, or, ideally, realized master.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, both of the famous commentators, Upatissa (1<sup>st</sup> Century CE) and Buddhagosa (4<sup>th</sup> Century CE), in the *Vimuttimaggā*<sup>3</sup> and *Visudhimaggā*<sup>4</sup> respectively emphasize the importance of *Kalyāṇa-mitta*. For those lucky enough to have found a realized master to study with, nothing further need be said. However, in modern America, individuals wishing to engage in the spiritual life as taught by the Buddha can encounter an issue. Without copious amounts of research no one can be realistically expected to find such authoritative teachers of the Buddha's dispensation (Pāli *Dhamma*; Skr. *Dharma*; Tib. *chos*). For these people, a more diverse definition of *kalyāṇa-mitta* is increasingly relevant.

The most important function that spiritual friends can perform is to encourage their students/friends to practice. For if there is a truism that may be said about the path of spiritual development, it is that no one else can do it for you. A spiritual friend simply opens the door, but it is you that must walk through that door. All these well-worn spiritual clichés aside, as each of us moves through life we encounter others who offer insight, guidance, and fodder for practice. Whether these encounters are by virtue of the ripening of past karma<sup>5</sup>, the synchronic functioning of the Tao<sup>7</sup>, simple chance, or

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<sup>1</sup> *Kalyāṇa-mitta* (Skr. *-mitra*) typically carries the implication of the individual being a teacher. In the *Upaddha Sutta*, Buddha admonishes Ānanda for stating that the *kalyāṇa-mitta* is only half of the spiritual life, when according to the Buddha such a spiritual friend is actually the entire spiritual path. It is understood that not all people have access to enlightened teachers to show them the way, thus it emphasized that one should seek a spiritual friend who has a very high degree of spiritual development.

<sup>2</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*. (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 'Upaddha Sutta' (SN 45.2) <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn45/sn45.002.than.html>

<sup>3</sup> N.R.M. Ehara; Soma Thera; Kheminda Thera Upatissa, Arahant. *The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimaggā)*. (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society 1995), 48–50

<sup>4</sup> Buddhaghosa Thera, and Ñāṇamoli Thera. *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimaggā*. (Seattle, WA: BPE Pariyatti Editions, 1999) 90.

<sup>5</sup> Maurice Walshe, O C. *Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012). 223 – 231 'Mahānidāna Sutta' (DN 15).

<sup>6</sup> D. Phillip Stanley, "Handout 1: Model of How Afflictions & Karma Arise" (class handout for REL624, Naropa University, 2017), 2.

some other unfathomable force, they do arise and sometimes at the perfect time for their presence or teachings to affect our spiritual pursuit. Such is the case of Frederick Lenz, as I discovered.

Born in America, yet drawn away from the dominant cultural narrative I had been raised in, I knew there must be teachings that addressed the underlying dis-ease I contended with. Following the lineage of countless others who sought with ardor for obscured answers to the deep questions of life, I placed my trust in the source of Dhamma, the Buddha. I was gripped with awe for this man who fearlessly persisted through the torment of austerities and tremendous discipline, taking himself to the very precipice of death only to discover that such extremes were ultimately self-defeating.

I have been blessed to know the sweet taste of Dhamma; the potent experience of delicate happiness that cuts through the clutter of daily life, nourishing the mind like nothing else ever could. Tears come to my eyes for lacking the skill to communicate by mere words the deep reverence, love and gratitude I hold for Lord Buddha, The Blessed One; the Fully Enlightened *Tathāgata* (Thus Gone One – an epitaph for the Buddha). It is here that I find the core, the heartwood of my practice. The many teachers who have guided me along my path of study and meditative development serve to bring me closer to that colossal figure, saint and sage, to whom practitioners supplicate.

The Buddha taught up until the moment of his passing into *Parinibbāna* (ultimate liberation). Included in those final utterances, Buddha compelled his *saṅgha* (community of followers) to become their own island of refuge, to find solace and guidance in the teachings as they had been expressed, and finally - to practice. There was no need to designate a successor to lead his monastic community because as the Buddha explained to *Ānanda*: “[W]hat I have taught and explained to you as Dhamma and discipline will, at my passing, be your teacher.” Finally, with one last admonition: “Now, monks, I declare to you: all things are of a nature to decay – strive on untiringly.” With that, the Blessed one entered into meditative absorption and passed into final *nibbāna*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jean Shinoda, Bolen, *The Tao of Psychology: Synchronicity and The Self* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2004)

<sup>8</sup> Maurice Walshe, *Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012). 223 – 231 ‘Mahāparinibbāna Sutta’ (DN 16).

Two thousand five hundred years passed. As Dr. Lenz explains it, the confluence of thoughts from an ever-increasing population that was moving away from spiritual pursuits obstructed access to the higher planes of consciousness and other dimensional localities.<sup>9</sup> Now, as a result, it is extremely difficult to access these higher levels of consciousness without the guidance and support of a realized master.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, such realized individuals are few and far between. Through fortunate causes and conditions Dr. Lenz was supported in his spiritual endeavors and by his admission, they were extremely fruitful.<sup>11</sup>

I had never heard of Dr. Lenz or his work prior to applying for the support of the Lenz Foundation in pursuit of my second Master of Arts degree in Buddhist and Religious Studies at Naropa University. Intrigued and albeit confused by his distinct and non-traditional approach to the spiritual path, I made it my business to familiarize myself with his work, both written and spoken.

I have no desire or authority to pass judgment on the spiritual prowess of others. As I stated earlier, I value the teachings that bring me closer to the Buddha, which is to say, closer to awareness of the genuine unfiltered content of reality. I have deep faith in the Buddha's Dhamma. In my exploration of the various turnings of the wheel, from the foundational, through the Mahāyāna and into the Vajrayāna, Zen and so forth, I strive to discern the finger pointing at the moon from the moon itself. What these turnings have provided me is a progression through which to develop. Starting in the earliest records of the teachings, focused intently on discipline, restraint, and clear thinking, my logical and historical foundation became sound. Studying the Mahāyāna and subsequently Vajrayāna traditions brings in a powerful emphasis of emptiness, great compassion, and the skillful expediting of spiritual development – the “short path” as Dr. Lenz refers to it.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Frederick Lenz, *Surfing the Himalayas: A Spiritual Adventure* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1997). & Frederick Lenz, *Snowboarding to Nirvana*. (New York: St. Martins Griffin, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Frederick Lenz, *The Lakshmi Series* (Los Angeles, CA: Frederick P. Lenz Foundation for American Buddhism, 2007), 205.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 375-392.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 202-209.

My insights are no doubt preliminary, lacking the clarity of true wisdom that comes through years of diligent effort of the kind described by countless honorable teachers. I am but a young student. It is my distinct privilege to have found appropriate causes and conditions to follow in the footsteps of the enlightened. I have studied diligently, cloistered in libraries and silent houses, remaining steadfast in the belief that this path is leading me where I need to go.

Time and time again I ask myself: What value is study bereft of practice in this, my chosen field? I chose early in my journey to travel to a Buddhist country, Thailand, of which I had some modest experience, and surrounded myself with monks, nuns, and professors who had spent the entirety of their lives studying and living the teachings of the Buddha. Further, their emphasis on the early Pāli scriptures appealed to my desire to acquaint myself with the Buddha and his teachings in as direct a way as possible. It seemed the obvious place to ground my understanding of Buddhism. To this day, that choice represents a distinct shift in the trajectory of my life in a way that I could not have ever anticipated.

Suddenly, I was immersed in something that I had only ever seen from afar – as an outsider. I met individuals in Thailand who were examples of the kind of simple joy of life that I had sought. What was more, it was not money or fame that brought them joy, but the simple act of life. The smallest of things were brought into sharp relief, the singing of birds or the feeling of a cool breeze. As I learned from the example of these incredible people, I dove deeply into the Pāli canon and language. My practice strengthened and my determination to nurture the arising of wisdom grew.

The urge to don the robe and take up the bowl was ever-present in my mind, as it still is to this day. I convinced myself that my altruistic goals would be more effectively pursued from outside the order of monks. I firmly held to the notion that even lay-persons could become enlightened.

Like many others I believe that an enlightened master would be of a certain archetypal variety. By his own admission, Dr. Lenz claimed to be enlightened,<sup>13</sup> which initially gave me great cause to question him, believing that an enlightened master would not publically state such things. I never had the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 172-176.

opportunity to meet the man and was thus required to form my opinions based on the body of work that he left behind.

Reflecting now, a year on from learning of Dr. Lenz, I am struck to conclude that one of his principal aims was to loosen some of the rigidity of view that many ascribe to the experience of enlightenment. Certainly, Dr. Lenz breaks cleanly with the classical images of enlightened beings, whether on a snowboard jumping over a chasm or with his wild hair loose and playing an instrument. Even when compared with other notable contemporaries such as Chögyam Trungpa, who also broke with established norms of the position of spiritual master or guru, Dr. Lenz seems to be in a category all his own.

In the fictionalized accounts of his journey to spirituality, Rama inadvertently runs into a teacher who teaches him how to re-awaken his past enlightenment: Master Fwap. Master Fwap is a joyous figure, replete with jokes, lightly held cynicism, and yes, even snowboarding. Even within this break with traditional accounts, I find that such an image of enlightenment re-affirms a more basic intuitive understanding of what I expect of such realized individuals. It would be quite peculiar after all, if enlightenment were gained at the expense of the ability to not take life too seriously.

What I see is an attempt to redefine these classically held beliefs that demand certain traits like solemnity from realized people. There seem to be two inter-related and not mutually exclusive reasons for such an approach. First, there is what could be seen as a modern skillful means of teaching the modern population who are put off by the traditional motifs of spiritual masters, but will only be receptive to teachings from a more (in their view) approachable source.

Secondly, and more to the point of what I think he was trying to show, we should look at how Dr. Lenz portrays himself in his fiction series. He is shown as a self-righteous kid who has no interest in spiritual pursuits.<sup>14</sup> In many ways this makes him a clear archetype for modern Americans, who are contained by a narrative of capitalism, domination and ridged science. Effectively, there is very little room in our cultural narrative for serious spiritual pursuit, to the extent that those who choose this path

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<sup>14</sup> Frederick P. Lenz, *Surfing the Himalayas: A Spiritual Adventure*. (New York: St. Martins Press, 1997).

are sometimes devalued and ascribed a weak intellect, susceptible to coercion from fake magical tales and grandiose language. This perverse narrative attempts to undercut the value of spiritual pursuit in society. It thus betrays the basic insecurities that led to our society's white-knuckled grip on the provable.

Dr. Lenz attempted to diverge from the rigid academic and intellectual backdrop of Buddhist studies and instead focus on the unfelt non-experience of enlightenment. In this way his methods, and to some extent he himself (as he presented himself), are reminiscent of the *Licchavi Vimalakīrti* from the Mahayana sutra *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*<sup>15</sup>. Vimalakīrti in the sūtra is a lay-man who, despite his distinctly non-traditional livelihood, is considered the foremost in insight. Even in comparison to the *arahants* and bodhisattvas found elsewhere throughout the canonical literature Vimalakīrti is the wisest. This sūtra historically gained relevance no doubt because of the dramatically different depiction of enlightened beings that it presents. It has been frequently cited among the sources that support the lay-path to enlightenment.<sup>16</sup>

It can be easy for some to assume that the extreme confidence and seeming arrogance with which Dr. Lenz's message was at times espoused cannot be the traits of a realized master. These individuals hold to a conservative interpretation of what an enlightened master should be. They, just as I have in the past held, believe that enlightened individuals does not proclaim their enlightenment as Dr. Lenz did. Rather, an enlightened being from that perspective is modest, humble, and reserved; even more to the point, in the *Nikāya* tradition the enlightened individual should necessarily be a monk.<sup>17</sup> Still, is it not the height of folly for unenlightened individuals to assume that they know what the enlightened being would

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<sup>15</sup> Robert A.F. Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (New York: The Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> There is no reason to conclude that without the Vimalakīrti Sūtra, that enlightenment would be exclusively reserved for the monastic community. The Pāli canon does not suggest that it is impossible to become enlightened outside of the monk-hood; rather there are several lay-figures who do achieve variously high levels of realization. There is a certain expectation in those suttas that once realization dawns, a lay-practitioner would then immediately join the monastic community.

<sup>17</sup> This last point is born out by some of the early source material of the Pāli canon, which insists that if an individual in the lay-community does become enlightened they must become a monk very quickly. Nowhere in the Pāli literature do we find mention of completely liberated lay-men or lay-woman who maintained their life after attainment.

appear as? Again, looking to the figure of Vimalakīrti, we see clearly those same (some might say abrasive) character traits shining brilliantly from an enlightened being.

## II

In his approach to the dhamma I have found Dr. Lenz to distance himself, possibly by design, from the realm of traditional academia. His method of instruction is distinctly non-academic, but rather similar to that of Ñāṇavīra Thera (born: Harold Edward Musson), whose principal mission was to elucidate the deep meaning of the Buddha's dispensation without becoming confused by centuries of (at times conflicting) scholarship.<sup>18</sup> It is perhaps prudent to read Dr. Lenz's work as a kind of commentary on the Buddha's teachings, a lens through which a diligent student may come to a deeper, more personal relationship with the teachings. Philosophically, it is clear that at least stylistically the two thinkers understood the nature of liberation and the other core concepts differently. Ñāṇavīra Thera favored a strict doctrinal explanation expecting his readers to have a command of the primary source material,<sup>19</sup> while Dr. Lenz approached difficult topics from a variety perspectives, some assuming a complete lack of background research and at other times a far reaching command of certain philosophical and practice oriented teachings from a wide variety of historical traditions.

It is, for this reason, a distinctly difficult task to synthesize the corpus of Dr. Lenz's writings and teachings other than to place them outside the normative categories of traditional philosophies and lineages. Further, as I suggest, placing his emphasis on practice at the forefront of his exhortation brings forth the practical take away he desired to impart on future students. It is that demand for personal practice that has so invigorated me and encouraged my own personal development, even while my meditation practice is informed principally from other teachers and lineages.

The doctor's teachings place a great deal of emphasis on the more pragmatic elements of human life, and just like so many other reputable teachers, Lenz provided his readers with wholesome advice on how to live skillfully. One of the more complicated questions that modern students of Buddhist teachings

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<sup>18</sup> Ñāṇavīra, *Clearing the Path; Writings of Ñāṇavīra Thera (1960 -1965)* (Path Press 1988, 2003), 5-6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-10.

encounter is how to reconcile the practical demands of modern life and the imperatives of self-less giving, morality, patience, and so forth found therein. While on the surface it can appear that there is no conflict for the serious student, reality is not always so black and white. Dr. Lenz re-affirms his compassionate friendship in this regard by providing sagely advice through his written works. In the Lakshmi Series, Dr. Lenz can at times become exceedingly pragmatic, such as when he describes how to develop a healthy living arrangement. His primary contention is that one should hold housemate relationships very lightly and compassionately.<sup>20</sup>

One thing that made Dr. Lenz so compelling a teacher and model is found in his insistence that the preliminary experiences of awakening that many students encounter are really only impediments on the path to genuine full enlightenment. In certain of his published talks, Dr. Lenz reminisces on past students, who after practicing with him for a relatively short period of time incorrectly believe themselves to be enlightened.<sup>21</sup> What is more, as evidenced in numerous of his published works, is his contention that it is the student's sole prerogative whether or not to practice. He was not claiming to teach anything that was unavailable without his help. Rather, Dr. Lenz repeatedly stresses the importance of finding a qualified spiritual master who can guide the student one-on-one. Dr. Lenz explains this process for the spiritual practitioner:

You have to feel that the most important thing is to merge with eternity. That has to be your top priority. Then it is necessary to find a teacher who teaches the short path, to find a bodhisattva, a liberated, enlightened person who lives in this world, who accepts students and who will accept you as a student. That teacher will then show you, map out for you, a course of study, which you will follow both inwardly and outwardly... The specifics you will only learn from your individual teacher and only after you have studied for many years with that teacher and the teacher is certain that you are ready for them – the advanced steps, in other words.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Lenz, *Lakshmi*, 223.

<sup>21</sup> Zenaghorī. "Instant Enlightenment - Rama (Dr Frederick Lenz)." YouTube. August 28, 2012. Accessed August 01, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXLP0vhPbas>.

<sup>22</sup> Lenz, *Lakshmi*. 205.

The presence of such a spiritual master is thus essential for the serious student. The student's close proximity allows the master to elevate the consciousness of the student, permitting them to momentarily glimpse the more profound and subtle levels of consciousness that would otherwise require many lifetimes of practice for the student to attain by themselves (Skr. *Adhiṣṭhāna*; Tib. *byin rlaps*). Dr. Lenz's insistence on finding a qualified spiritual master to guide one through the difficult process of awakening insight is reassuring from my perspective. It affords me the opportunity to reach outside of the confines of Dr. Lenz's personal teachings and to lean heavily on the methods of instruction that have aroused my mind to be intent upon enlightenment in the past.

What other people may have experienced of Dr. Lenz or the views that they hold regarding his status as a spiritual teacher are from my perspective only interesting commentaries. As I hope I have made abundantly clear, the value that I ascribe to the collected teachings of Dr. Lenz is not that they are in themselves to be worshipped. Rather, Dr. Lenz provides a modern American perspective informed through his own practice that serves to bring the reader closer to the source of the Dhamma – The Buddha. In so far as he has helped me in my growth towards this worthy goal, he has performed a valuable function for which I am very grateful. At the same time, the Lenz Foundation, which generously funded a significant portion of my graduate program at Naropa University, in accordance with the bequest of Dr. Lenz's estate, stands as an example of the degree of commitment Dr. Lenz exhibited to helping spread good teachings, not for his own notoriety, but because of the potential to help a great many people. As Lynne Twist expressed in her Lenz scholar speech, financial support is a core requirement of all positive social movements.<sup>23</sup> Dr. Lenz thus articulated his commitment to the growth and spread of American Buddhism in a truly significant way, for which I am genuinely grateful.

### III

The *Lenz Effect* is a concept of my own invention referring to my own experience of being inspired to practice through the influence of Dr. Lenz's teachings.

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<sup>23</sup> Lynne Twist "Lynne Twist." Vimeo. June 11, 2017. Accessed June 04, 2017. <https://vimeo.com/52267578>.

I define The Lenz Effect as:

**The potent motivation for practice derived from interacting with the work of Frederick Lenz that, when engaged with, becomes a means for realizing the path and progressing towards cessation.**

It is **the potent motivation for practice derived from interacting with the work of Frederick Lenz**, because from the perspective of ordinary sentient beings it may be more persuasive than traditional<sup>24</sup> [Buddhist] methods and it is only arisen on the basis of interacting with Dr. Lenz's work. Further, it is **that** which, **when engaged with, becomes a means for realizing the path**, because the efficacy of the motivation is conditioned on the disposition of the student's mind inclining towards cultivation, as opposed to simply engaging with the material for mere worldly purposes. Not limited to the extent of simple personal development and cultivation, the Lenz Effect aids in one **progressing towards cessation**, because even if the student initially holds alternative motivations (such as the manifesting of supernatural powers), the awoken conviction in the self-evident nature of Dharma<sup>25</sup> inspires the necessary motivation for the paths of accumulation and preparation. This progression will eventually rectify those wrong views, facilitate the intellectual realization of two-fold selflessness and demonstrate why cessation is the most worthy goal that one may pursue.

Dr. Lenz considered that he taught the "short path" of practice, which is for the "serious student" as opposed the "long path" which is for the "happy student".<sup>26</sup> Most students are intrigued by such a statement and are rightly interested. Even further than such encouraging notions, Dr. Lenz in his demeanor and message powerfully boosts ones' enthusiasm for practice. In my own experience, I find myself inexorably drawn to my cushion following studying Dr. Lenz's work. The Lenz Effect has no

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<sup>24</sup> I discuss in previous sections the pedagogical methods of masters as they are typically understood: stoicism, serving as example, reliance on the words of The Buddha, and so forth. I am here referring to that as "traditional."

<sup>25</sup> I here use the Sanskrit term 'Dharma' as opposed the Pāli equivalent term 'Dhamma' because of the Mahāyāna context of both Dr. Lenz's teachings and the explanation of the five paths. My use of Pāli in the rest of the article is not an inconsistency.

<sup>26</sup> Lenz, *Lakshmi*. 204.

doubt been experienced by many of Rama’s followers over the years, who found a deep well of motivation to practice through his teachings and presence.

If there is a truism about spiritual practice it is that no one can do it for you. The only way to progress in meditation practice is to practice more. Since the time of the Buddha this has been the case and it necessarily cannot be otherwise. Advanced or realized meditation instructors are attempting to help the beginners awaken to their own true nature, which is only gained through consistent, diligent practice. It is of the highest importance that teachers exhort their students along the path by way of correct Dhamma. This means that it aligns with the Buddha’s dispensation.

Let us step back and look at a classic Mahāyāna metric of how a very serious practitioner on the path of the *bodhisattva*<sup>27</sup> is judged – the six perfections or *parāmitā*. In order they are: (1) *dāna* (generosity), (2) *śīla* (virtue/morality), (3) *kṣānti* (patience), (4) *vīrya* (energy/enthusiasm), (5) *dhyāna* (meditation), and (5) *prajñā* (wisdom).<sup>28</sup> Some specific examples from Dr. Lenz’s work show him exhorting readers to cultivate these qualities, even on a very modest level, demonstrating his efficacy as a spiritual friend.

Dr. Lenz dedicates an entire talk to the topic, *The Yoga of Selfless Giving*. He states, “Selfless giving is the art of living...”<sup>29</sup> and later, “So give more and more of yourselves. Don’t hold back. Life is so short and there is so much to do. Align yourself with others who seek what you seek. Meditate deeply. Play with your life, have fun with it, and do what you can for others along the way. Don’t expect others to admire you or appreciate you or understand you. Just do what you can, that’s the joy. Don’t wait for a return on the investment. Just give, give, give. But don’t burn yourself out either.”<sup>30</sup>

This teaching reaches right to the core of the spiritual path. As the first perfection illuminated in the classic dispensation, generosity is understood to be the appropriate starting place for which to practice

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<sup>27</sup> Skrt. *Bodhisattva*, Pāli. *Bodhisatta* Literally “awakened being”

<sup>28</sup> Dale Wright, *The Six Perfections: Buddhism and the Cultivation of Character* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). The Pāli sources enumerate ten perfections (*dasa pāramiyo*), which closely mirror the Mahāyāna collection.

<sup>29</sup> Lenz, *Lakshmi*, 74.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

the livelihood of an enlightened being. Indeed Nāgārjuna explains extensively how the perfection of generosity facilitates all of the later perfections coming into being. His exposition illustrates how actions grounded in generosity function to reduce ones clinging to self-view. As a result of lessening the individuals' attachment to their own ego, continually grasping for more pleasure and the avoidance of pain, the mind is increasingly brought under control and the various defilements (Pali: *kilesa*; Skr. *kleśa*; Tib: *nyon mongs*) are left without adequate foundation from which to perpetuate themselves.<sup>31</sup>

Further, it is not difficult to find examples of Dr. Lenz instructing his followers in the other five perfections. Thus it is reasonable to conclude that at least broadly, Dr. Lenz's teachings are in alignment with the teachings of the Buddha. Dr. Lenz repeatedly calls for compassion and respect without losing personal agency. This constant theme through his published works likewise place his teachings in the category of good dhamma. Finally, and most significantly, Dr. Lenz exhibited some ineffable quality that stoked the fires of effort in his followers, driving them to practice more and more.

#### IV

Dr. Lenz, without ever meeting me, provided me with something significant. He became a genuine spiritual friend for me. Although I read many Dhamma books, listen to countless Dhamma talks and discourse with my colleagues about the nuances of view and dhamma, what is needed is practice. When I read Dr. Lenz's work, I become filled with passion for practice. I find the motivation with his support to find the meditation cushion and to collect my mind. His teachings elicit for me a desire to make homage to worthy ones. All the individuals who have linked together the golden chain of teachings through time so that I may benefit from good, internally consistent instruction are all worthy of my veneration and respect. I do not elevate any among them.

Furthermore, Dr. Lenz's unique style of incorporating a diversity of views from various philosophical schools and presenting them in the context of their commonalities from the perspective of a

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<sup>31</sup> Nāgārjuna, Kumārajīva, and Dharmamitra. *Nāgārjuna on the Six Perfections: an Ārya Bodhisattva Explains the Heart of the Bodhisattva Path: Exegesis on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra Chapters 17-30*. (Seattle, WA: Kalavinka Press, 2009), Pages 47-49.

realized individual is refreshing. While there are purists in all the various philosophies that he engaged with: Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Taoism, or Confucianism – all of which Dr. Lenz at various points references in his teachings – there is no necessity for the unique contexts to exist solely in isolation. Nor is it necessarily appropriate for an unrealized individual to assume that it must be one or another. Dr. Lenz navigates this interesting intersection in a highly appealing manner. He addresses the different philosophical systems from the perspective of an enlightened individual dealing with their common loci and explanations that matched with his realization.

Spiritual friendship is unique and significant offering, for which I can recognize Dr. Lenz. On the obvious level, having come from a similar cultural context as my own, Dr. Lenz represents a realization of my belief that human spiritual prowess and enlightenment are not archetypal or monolithic. Still, that is not what brings me to write this, for without Dr. Lenz I would still hold that belief. His offering to me is a personal relationship that his many followers can no doubt relate to. I do not so much consider myself a student of Dr. Lenz as I do view him as a friend. He offers himself as support, and speaks to each of us directly. He is no longer alive yet the friendship and support that he offered so selflessly, persists.

As we know, Buddha declared to Ānanda that a spiritual friend constitutes an indispensable element of the path to liberation. Buddha then proceeds to explain how a spiritual friend supports a practitioner. He explains that an individual with virtuous and admirable people as friends can be expected to develop along the Eight-Fold Path, stating:

And how does a monk who has admirable people as friends, companions, & comrades, develop & pursue the noble eightfold path? There is the case where a monk develops right view dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in relinquishment. He develops right resolve... right speech... right action... right livelihood... right effort... right mindfulness... right concentration dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in relinquishment. This is how a monk who has admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues, develops & pursues the noble eightfold path.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*. (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 45.2 “Upaddha Sutta”.

Clearly, the Buddha was intent on emphasizing the personal nature of spiritual progress. It is understood that the camaraderie and support that a spiritual friend offers is essential for the individual to realize the goal. The significance is this: When inspired by Rama to sit, it is not as an act of supplication to him. I will never construct shrines of him to worship. I see him in the same light of all others, and I recognize his journey in pursuit of the same realization I myself seek. I respect his sagely advice, I learn and grow from his teachings, but mostly I persist more ardently in my practice due to the flame he nurtures in me to grow. His gift to me of spiritual friendship is something that I cherish.

Dr. Lenz created a body of work that addresses people in many different areas of life. To some he taught the basics of morality and how to live skillfully in the modern world. To others he taught basic meditation practices, while also making offerings of more advanced practices that could be engaged in by interested students. This was exceptionally skillful as it allowed for esoteric teachings to be engaged with by a modern audience who would be very resistant to hearing of the techniques and logics from traditional sources. There is no more generous act than to help spread the dhamma – without proselytizing. To help make the Buddha’s dispensation available in a manner that many people would find it approachable is a highly meritorious act. Dr. Lenz’s writings and recordings are offered to posterity as spiritual friendship for those who feel culturally isolated from the roots of the Dhamma. As Buddha continues in the Upaddha sutta:

[T]hrough this line of reasoning one may know how admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life: It is in dependence on me as an admirable friend that beings subject to birth have gained release from birth, that beings subject to aging have gained release from aging, that beings subject to death have gained release from death, that beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair have gained release from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair. It is through this line of reasoning that one may know how admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 163

I genuinely appreciate the friendship and support the Dr. Lenz has offered me. I value his approach that emphasizes fluidity and a diversity of styles to the spiritual life, but which nonetheless are shown to be grounded in good dhamma, internally consistent and presented in a compassionate and helpful manner. The constant tendency Rama exhibited, to challenge and break with established assumptions about the spiritual life and life in general makes him an ideal spiritual friend for modern Americans. As he states at the end of his first book, *Lifetimes; True Accounts of Reincarnation*: “Wisdom means the ability to change and develop consciously, to continually question the assumptions by which we live.” I can honestly say that Dr. Lenz has supported me in developing my own wisdom, truly, the Noble Search<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Bhikkhu Thanissaro, *Ariyapariyesana Sutta: The Noble Search*. November 30, 2013. Accessed September 05, 2016. <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.026.than.html>.

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