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Demonizing or Enriching One Another

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Here in Thailand, where I live there is a new magazine on the stands named Farang. If you have been to Thailand you may know that Farang means foreigner. Foreigner refers to Westerners, not other Asians.

This magazine, written in English, caters to mostly travelers and short and long term visitors and residents of Thailand.

They had a recent article that was entitled "Assholes, why we dislike other Travelers."

It seemed like an article that was not really written with the intention of making individuals better understand and appreciate other human beings, be they travelers, Thai, Asians, or just stay at home and in country types.

There seems to be a tendency, among some individuals, the way news, social issues, and current affairs are put forth in the media, to demonize others, making them seem less than human and evil.

Recently, someone asked me of my opinion of Donald Rumsfeld, the robust U.S. Secretary of Defense. My answer was that as someone knowledgeable about Yoga and Buddhism, I looked at him as a human being who had suffering in his life that I should understand and feel compassion for.

Of course, over the years, In Europe, The Middle East and Asia, I have experienced some animosity to me because of an individual's resentment and anger to the policies, or perceived policies of the U.S. Government.

This really shows a short sightedness on their part, as I have no influence in what the United States foreign policy is.

When we practice Yoga and Buddhism, our awareness is redirected within, so that we better understand how we think and feel.

The benefits of this, though some may not see them as benefits are that we understand ourselves better, and in the process, can see these same feelings, issues, fear and hopes in others.

One of the great teachings of Buddhism is that all beings desire happiness, and all beings suffer.

It is hard for us to see the suffering in others until we see the suffering in ourselves.

When messages are put forth that create further hindrances to cultivating loving kindness, understanding and compassion between all people, what good is being done?

We seem to live in a competitive world, where we compare ourselves to others, in favorable and unfavorable ways much too often on a daily basis.

It seems to be impossible to avoid the various messages that create this kind of thinking, and the unwholesome emotional states that can be associated with or derived from that thinking.

In order to not be overwhelmed by these things, we can develop inner strength. This inner strength has as its foundation in a multitude of various attributes that we were all born with.

Though we may gain material wealth and pleasure, we may lose these attributes or be cynical about their benefits. We may not think of them as being practical or realistic to our lives and this time in history.

They are not determined by environment, wealth or culture and social situation. They are there, as part of our consciousness, to be accessed, and made more a part of our day to day perceptions and experiences with life and the world.

They are things like mindfulness, joy, investigation, concentration, energy, tranquility and equanimity.

As these are cultivated, we also cultivate this inner strength. As a result, instead of getting into habits where we demonize others in our thoughts, words and actions, we can instead, enrich another, and in the process, enrich ourselves.

This is what we need to cultivate, and in order to bring this about, some awareness and effort is necessary.

This awareness consists of understanding the spiritual teachings put forth. This requires exposure to them, study and reflection.

Effort means putting the teachings into practice, implementing them, applying them to our daily lives and living.

When we demonize others we are just strengthening those mental and physical states within ourselves, that hinder own understanding and joy.

When we enrich others, we can grow as individuals and together.