

Lance S. Cousins (7 April 1942–14 March 2015)

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I first met Lance Cousins at the University of Cambridge in 1969. My first reaction to him was one of alarm. To me, a new undergraduate, he was one of the lecturers, immensely old and knowledgeable. It never crossed my mind that he was a struggling postgraduate student, and only a few years older than me. (The long, forked beard that he wore at that time did not help matters.)

Lance was teaching us one of our Sanskrit set texts, one of the less-celebrated passages of the *Mahābhārata*. The Sanskrit course at Cambridge at that time was based almost entirely on grammar, with little attention paid to content, but he managed to smuggle in a lot of material on religion and culture, and I grew to enjoy his classes very much. Once, the first word of a śloka took up almost a whole session to discuss. (The word was *brahmā*.) I also came to realize that ‘Mr Cousins’ was someone I could talk to about the trials of student life, rather more than some who officially had a pastoral duty towards me.

Lance did not complete a PhD at this point. With a young family to support, he must have needed a salaried post, and in 1970 he was appointed Lecturer in Comparative Religion at the University of Manchester, where he taught Buddhism, Hinduism, comparative mysticism, Pali and Sanskrit. He remained there, first as a Lecturer and then as a Senior Lecturer, until 1993, when he took early retirement. Shortly afterwards he moved to Oxford, where he remained as active as ever, teaching Buddhism in the Faculty of Theology, and Pali and other Middle Indian languages in the Faculty of Oriental Studies.

Throughout that time, I never lost touch with him, and he remained a valued mentor, and in time a colleague, as well as a friend. Without access to

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his formidable knowledge, I would never have dared to tackle the translation of the *Dhammapada* from Pali, when my previous work had been in Sanskrit. My last memory of him is of sharing a meal at the Spalding Symposium, 2014, and being teased about my former students who were sitting around me. (In keeping with the feline topic of my paper at that event, he referred to them as my kittens.)

Alongside his scholarly work, Lance was committed to the practice of Buddhism, and from the mid-60s was influential in bringing a Thai form of Samatha meditation to the UK and helping it to take root here. He was one of the founders of the Samatha Trust, and was much sought after as a meditation teacher. Though he was careful to keep his Buddhist faith and his academic teaching of Buddhism separate, his practice gave him insights into aspects of texts that had been missed by those approaching them from a purely intellectual point of view; while his scholarship ensured that Samatha practice remained rooted in genuine Theravādin traditions, and avoided the anti-intellectualism that tends to afflict British Buddhist discourse.

Lance served as President of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies and of the Pali Text Society. He published over 40 articles, on topics including studies of Pali, Middle Indian and Buddhist Sanskrit texts; the history of Buddhist schools; and Abhidhamma literature and thought. He was very modest about his own attainments, but they were valued in many countries, especially in the Buddhist world. In 2013 he must have been delighted when he finally received his doctorate, when he was awarded the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Buddhist Studies by the Mahamakut Buddhist University, Bangkok.

Lance was a man of strongly expressed and sometimes reactionary opinions—though it was not always clear whether these reflected his actual beliefs, or were intended to challenge current received wisdom (but certainly he always enjoyed a good argument). In one area, at least, he was ahead of his time: he realized very early the coming importance of computers and the ways in which they would revolutionize academic work in areas such as lexicography and the study of texts. In the 1980s he encouraged the Pali Text Society to invest in computers for use in its work. (His early appreciation of the importance of the new technology may have been informed by his life-long love of science fiction.)

He was always very supportive of his students, and gave generously of his time to colleagues, whether studying a text with them, answering endless email queries, or taking part in discussions on Buddhism and Indology Lists. He will be missed by many people throughout the world, and I believe in time will come to be recognized as one of the great scholars of Pali and Buddhism.