

**PERSPECTIVE: Sex, Lies and Audiotapes**  
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As the “sex and lies” allegations unfolded in Washington over the past few weeks, I was overseas conducting training courses in England and the Netherlands. Not usually a “news-hound,” I found myself watching CNN and reading every English-language newspaper I could get my hands on each day to find out if we still had a president.

The media frenzy extended to Western Europe, and the story was covered extensively. The major concern of these countries, however, seemed to focus less on who was lying than on how these events would impact the effectiveness of America in the arena of world politics.

We have seen the scandal change in complexion daily, and no doubt it will do so for some time to come. My initial reaction was one of shock. I had many more questions than answers. Did President Clinton have sex with Monica Lewinsky? Did he encourage perjury? Who is telling the truth? If it’s true, should he step down? Is a criminal investigation appropriate? Could he have used such poor judgment? If so, do I want someone like that as our president? What is the responsibility of the press in reporting so much unsubstantiated news? How do we balance the public’s desire to know with an individual’s right to privacy ? Have we gone too far in scrutinizing the lives of our politicians? Do we have the right to expect our politicians to tell the truth? What is appropriate moral conduct?

Initial news reporting was very damaging, and my first feelings were that if this is true, President Clinton should step down quickly and not allow an investigation to drag on endlessly. As the story unfolded, however, it became less and less clear to me what occurred. The majority of Americans reportedly believed that President Clinton lied, but polls showed his highest approval ratings. My confusion increased. I began searching for a Buddhist perspective that would help me make sense of this very messy and complex situation.

It seemed that the lower worlds of Hell, Hunger, Animality and Anger were rampant. The major players involved — Bill and Hillary Clinton, Monica Lewinsky, William Ginsburg, Paula Jones, Kenneth Starr, Linda Tripp — all appeared to be adrift in a sea of suffering.

I reminded myself that each of these people, no matter how they have conducted themselves and for what reasons, has a Buddha nature.

When I saw the extent of misery and unhappiness apparent in each of their lives, it impressed on me the importance of our mission for kosen-rufu.

I understood more clearly how critical it is that we promote our Buddhist philosophy as a means of helping people both individually and collectively to tap their innate wisdom and overcome extreme suffering and unhappiness.

The second point that occurred to me is that I did not need to be a harsh critic of these people. SGI-USA General Director Zaitzu, in his article “How To Be Encouraging” (Jan. 23 *World Tribune*), listed two prime points: “Don’t judge” and “Develop your compassion.” He encourages us to realize that our assumptions are often incorrect. “People who present me with the toughest challenges,” he says, “are often the ones who turn my judgments inside out and help me see humanity, often where I least expect it.”

He also says that “One of the first steps in developing compassion is resisting the urge to criticize,” and he encourages us to feel another person’s sufferings as if they were our own.

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This led me to think about the oneness of self and environment and how these people and this situation are also a reflection of me and the society in which I live.

It struck me that the harshness of our collective views toward these people was an attempt to expect our environment to show us perfection while neglecting to polish or perfect our own lives. They are a reflection of ourselves and our society and show us how much human revolution we still need to do. To some degree, each of these people is showing some aspect of myself if I am willing to look deeply enough.

My last comment is about karma. What causes are being made here? How will these causes affect our future? What can we learn here, and how can we use our Buddhist practice to personalize this situation and turn “poison into medicine”?

In the fifth prayer of gongyo we pray for the peace of the world and the happiness of all humanity. One course of action is to chant abundant daimoku that something of value can emerge out of this very negative situation. If we reflect deeply, I believe these difficulties can become a steppingstone for creating a society that can act with wisdom and humanity.

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