

trading the good life for a better one

MAURIZIO CACCIATORE, 44, *high-flying executive and some-time president of internationally famous companies, had what seemed to be the good life. But his lifestyle was not giving him any satisfaction. So he left the glamour and the stresses of the corporate world and became a full-time student of the Master's Program for Western teachers of the Dharma. This is his story.*

I CAN'T SAY THAT I heroically decided to renounce mundane happiness in order to dedicate my life to Dharma. In fact, the quantity of mundane happiness that I was enjoying was small: though I had high status and beautiful girlfriends (the two most important things, it seems), I was perpetually nervous, restless, dissatisfied, angry and sometimes very sad.

Ten years ago, just after my divorce, I began to consider the possibility that the world was not responsible for my unhappiness, so I started seeing an analyst, first once, then three times a week. Six years later – such a long time for someone who considered himself to be smart and decisive – I realized the impossibility of finding personal happiness this way, and I finally renounced the idea of being “normalized”.

Meanwhile, as my career was continuously advancing, my level of intolerance and dissatisfaction was proportionally increasing. Dealing with me was becoming more and more difficult, especially for my shareholders and the people for whom I felt responsible.

EVEN THOUGH I WAS ACHIEVING remarkable results in my career, I was changing jobs frequently. My attitude



Maurizio Cacciatore with his grand daughter Giulia Cacciatore

was that I could not tolerate the level of hypocrisy, mediocrity and stupidity surrounding me, which seemed to increase the more I was climbing the pyramid of society – at least that was how I saw it. In short, I was looking for some excuse to send everything to hell and get rid of all of it, once and for all.

Parallel to this, I had started to go to a Zen center, practicing meditation on a very irregular basis, and completely stopping any practice every time I had a new girlfriend or a new job. I would start again as soon as the first signs of disappointment reappeared.

In 1996 I met Tibetan Buddhism through Geshe Jampa Gyatso, but still went on with my irregular way of practicing. Nevertheless, I was reading and

studying a lot, not only about Dharma but also about physics, biology, neurobiology, psychology and several other subjects, always looking for a way to gain a deeper understanding of reality.

Finally, during the summer of 1999 I went to Pomaia, Italy for a week to attend some teachings. It was there that I learnt, not only of the existence of the Master's Program, but also that in January of 2000 they were going to start *Madhyamika*, by far my favorite subject of all.

I'd already left my last job [as CEO of an international

Photo: Fabrizio Cacciatore



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transport and distribution company,] and all the conditions seemed favorable. Geshe-la agreed to admit me to the Program. Two months later, I moved to Pomaia.

There I found the best group of people I have ever met in my life, the possibility of continuous practice and a new view of myself and reality.

Based on my past experiences, I used to see Western Dharma people as crackpots and dropouts; people who were just following a fashion. But here was a group of almost 40 people from every part of the world, highly motivated, with intelligence much above the average and courage enough to leave everything to study Dharma for seven years, and after that, presumably, dedicate the rest of their life to the studying and teaching of Dharma. I was really impressed. Daily interaction with them did nothing but confirm my first impressions.

THE ADVANTAGES OF LIVING in such an environment are numberless. Not only do you receive precious teachings twice a day from an unbelievable master, you can discuss all topics at length with extremely sharp fellow students. You read lots of books about the most interesting subjects of the world (in truth, you buy a lot of them, then you read just a fraction of what you would like to). Furthermore, the simple fact of being confined in such a protected world, without all the distractions, worries and agitation of the outer world, is a great help, leading you to an increasing and quite often uncomfortable awareness of your mind and actions.

And so two years later I have rather changed my view of myself and reality. I have found a new freedom from a lot of the conditionings that had characterized my life. The grip of afflictions is still very strong on me, and their presence is even more evident, more pathetic and ridiculous than before; nevertheless, I cannot deny that something very deep has started to change in me, and this is the biggest blessing of all, since it gives me more confidence and motivation to continue on the path.

I always thought that no spiritual evolution is possible if one does not become fully aware of the part of himself he fears most, and my opinion of this is confirmed every day. As our friend and psychology teacher Vincenzo Tallarico told us once during a class, "People are ready to do anything in order to avoid looking at their own shadow, they are even ready to join a spiritual path." This is something that we all should keep in mind. I think that several Master's Program students in Pomaia have started realizing the meaning of this, and though their path has become much more painful now, I am

sure it will yield much better fruits in the future.

Some concrete changes have been rather dramatic for me: my income is now less than one-fifth of my old one. I used to think it would not be possible for me to live without a lot of money; now I have discovered that it is, and I don't miss a single thing that I used to enjoy.

Also where once I was used to people accepting my ideas without too many problems, and to have the last word in all discussions, the situation here could not be more different. I have had to reduce my pride considerably, after a lot of struggle. Finally, I have had to deal with a few difficult people of a type I have never had the chance to relate to before, but this has also been very good for my practice of patience, or better still for fully realizing how poor my patience and compassion are.

MAYBE YOU WERE EXPECTING some deeper and more intelligent reflections from a person of my age and experience, but these are just the naked facts. Anything more elevated would just be poetry or a lie, in my case. ❁

Maurizio Cacciatore has a degree in Economics from the University of Torino, Italy. He has held executive positions with Price Waterhouse, Milan's stock-market, the publishing company Mondadori, in real estate and the apparel company Marzotto. His most recent appointments were as CEO and general manager of Simint, the part of the Armani Group which produces Armani Jeans and Emporio Armani lines; and as CEO and general manager of Tecnologistica, a logistics group with 4,000 employees.