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AWAKEN to...

Compassion & Wisdom on the journey of life...

Published three times a year by Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery, AWAKEN is a FREE bilingual Buddhist magazine that aims to help readers gain insight and make sense of life's journey using the Dharma.

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New Year Blessings

Time zooms by. In the blink of an eye, we are at the end of 2015 and 2016 will make its debut shortly. Let me take this opportunity as we prepare to welcome the new year to thank all writers, readers and supporters for their concern and ardent support of *Awaken* magazine: your hard work is deeply appreciated! At the same time, I sincerely wish all *Awaken* writers, readers, fans and followers who contribute tirelessly to its work; all Venerables, instructors, staff and Dharma volunteers who work diligently in the background to facilitate the work of the Singapore Buddhist College; and all colleagues, volunteers and supporters of Kong Men San Phor Khar See Monastery who wholeheartedly give their best...a Happy New Year! May your merits and wisdom multiply, your path be smooth and easy, and your wishes come true.

Awaken has come a long way since it started ten years ago. Thanks to everyone's staunch support, it has grown from a small seedling into a towering tree. Throughout this journey, we remain steadfast to its primary purpose to connect with the general public who are interested in Buddhism through reader-friendly articles with mass appeal and wide dissemination. Presenting short Buddhist articles in various formats that readers can easily relate to in their lives, profound Dharma teachings are made accessible and comprehensible to all. This enables those who embrace the Dharma to cleanse their minds, activate wisdom, enhance their quality of life and achieve inner transformation.

A new year brings forth a new mission. Under the guidance and patronage of all Buddha and Bodhisattvas, we shall emulate the Mahayana Bodhisattvas' spirit to benefit all sentient beings and continue to proactively engage in Dharma propagation for the good of all beings and society, based on the Buddha's teachings of compassion, equality, harmony and gratitude. We shall work hard to cultivate exemplary monastics who excel in professional Buddhist research, management and Dharma dissemination.

Once again, here's wishing all of you good physical and mental health, and a happy Spring Festival! ☺

Sik Kwang Sheng (Ven)
Abbot, Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery

*Recognise, cherish and
nurture your blessings,
and seize every chance
to be of service.
For those who can take things on
and let them go in peace,
every year is an auspicious year.*

Master Sheng Yen

Everyone desires to be happy (pg 54). Nobody wants to suffer and be unhappy. But do we truly know the way to happiness?

Modern society encourages excessive consumption and having lots of money as the way to a successful and happy life. But as Jack Kornfield points out (pg 44), "outer material successes won't bring happiness unless they are also married to a wise and peaceful heart."

Dr Alan Wallace also reiterates, at the Buddhism & Science Symposium, that there is a distinction between *hedonia* and *eudaimonia* (pg 43).

It is precisely *eudaimonia* – the genuine happiness we derive from the well-being that we bring to the world – that drives *Patch Adam* to altruistic behaviour (pg 71).

And this altruism, or altruistic love and compassion, is the heart of the spiritual path (pg 40, 66, 70).

Practising the Dharma heals the heart and gives one peace of mind (pg 47, 62). Primed by mindfulness, we are able to develop deeper insights about our life and mind. For mindfulness has the delightful capacity to make the mind balanced and clear in any situation.

On page 48, discover other tips from a Venerable on how we can lead a happy life.

Elsewhere in this issue, learn too on how we can kick-start the New Year on a wholesome note by setting the intention to eliminate our negative qualities (pg 53).

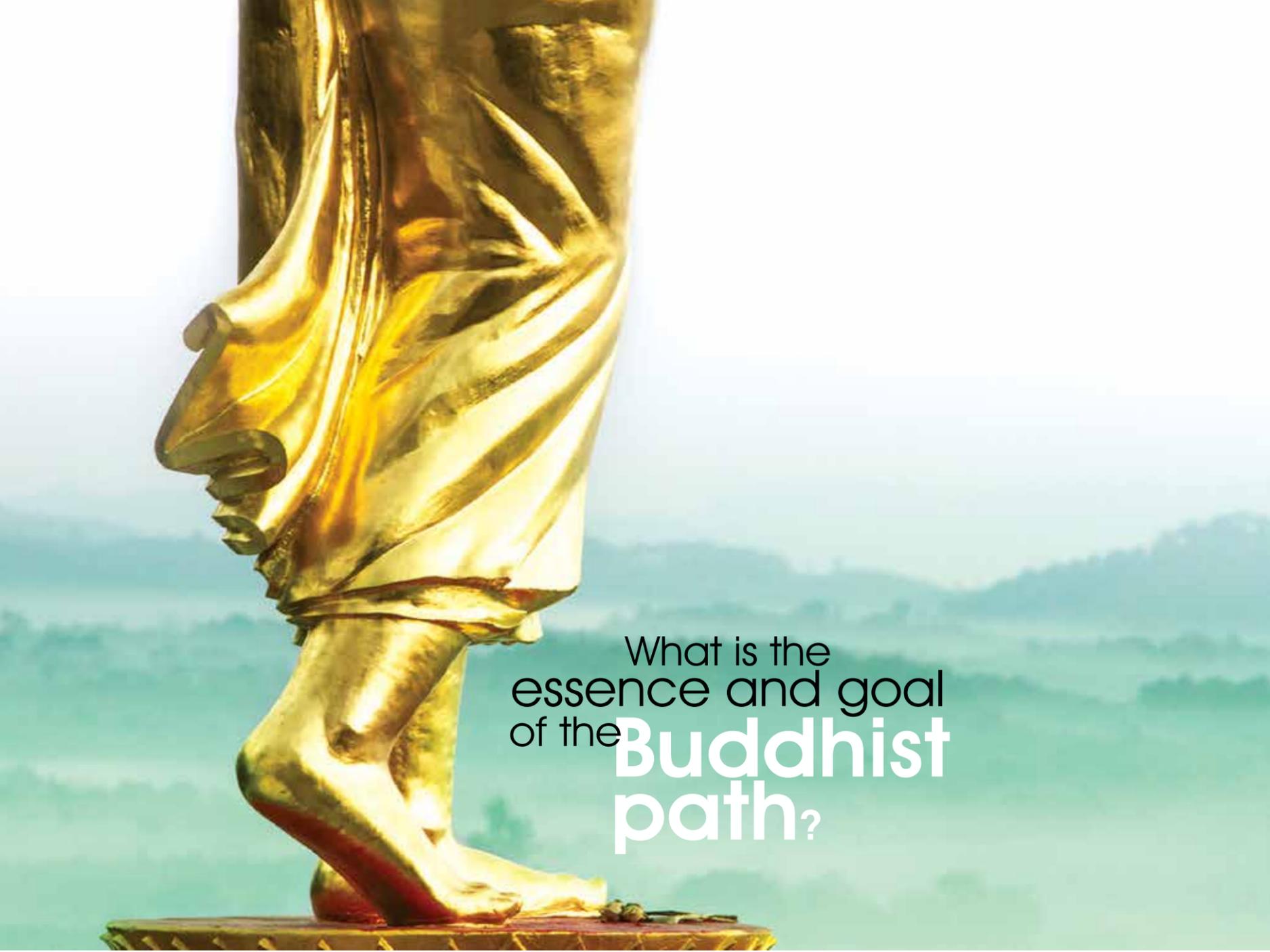
Happy reading and have a blissful and peaceful 2016. ☺

The Way to happiness

Esther Thien

Yours in the Dharma,
Sister Esther Thien





What is the essence and goal of the Buddhist path?

Q: What is the essence of the Buddha's teachings? – T.Y

A: Simply speaking, it is to avoid harming others and to help them as much as possible. Another way of expressing this is, "Abandon negative action; create perfect virtue; subdue your own mind. This is the teaching of the Buddha." By abandoning negative actions, such as anger, attachment and closed-mindedness, we stop harming ourselves and others. By creating perfect virtue, we develop beneficial attitudes, such as impartial love and compassion, and act constructively. By subduing our minds and understanding reality, we leave behind all false projections, thus making ourselves calm and peaceful.

The essence of the Buddha's teachings is also contained in the three principles of the path: the determination to be free, the altruistic intention and the wisdom of realising the lack of fantasised ways of existence.

Initially, we must have the determination to be free from the confusion of our problems and their causes. Then we'll see that other people also have problems, and with love and compassion we'll develop an altruistic intention to become a Buddha so that we will be capable of helping others effectively. To do this, we must develop the wisdom which understands the real nature of ourselves and other phenomena and thus eliminates all false projections.

Q: What is the goal of the Buddhist path? – Y.H

A: It is to discover a state of lasting happiness for both ourselves and others by freeing ourselves from cyclic existence, the cycle of constantly recurring problems that we experience at present. Under the influence of ignorance, disturbing attitudes and actions, we are born and die, experiencing various problems during our lives. Although all of us want to be happy and we try hard to get the things that will make us happy, no one is totally satisfied with his or her life. And although we all want to be free from difficulties, problems come our way without us even trying. People may have many good things going for them in their lives, but when we talk with them for more than five minutes, they start telling us their problems. Those of us who are in this situation, who aren't yet Buddhas, are called "sentient beings".

The root cause of cyclic existence is ignorance: we don't understand who we are, how we exist or how other phenomena exist. Unaware of our own ignorance, we project fantasised ways of existing onto ourselves and others, thinking that everyone and everything has some inherent nature and exists independently, in and of itself. This gives rise to attachment, an attitude that exaggerates the good qualities of people and things or superimposes good qualities that aren't there and then clings to those people or things, thinking they will bring us real happiness. When things don't work out as we expected or wished they would, or when something interferes with our happiness, we become angry. These three basic disturbing attitudes – ignorance, attachment and anger – gives rise to a host of other ones, such as jealousy, pride and resentment. These attitudes then motivate us to act, speak or think. Such actions (karma) leave imprints on our mindstreams and these imprints then influence what we'll experience in the future.

We are liberated from the cycle of rebirth by generating the wisdom of realising "emptiness" or "selflessness". This wisdom is a profound understanding of the lack of fantasised ways of existing: the lack of a solid, independent self. It eliminates all ignorance, wrong conceptions and disturbing attitudes, thus putting a stop to all misinformed or contaminated actions. The state of being liberated is called Nirvana or liberation. All beings have the potential to attain liberation, a state of lasting happiness.

The Buddha summarised the process of going from confusion to enlightenment in the Four Noble Truths. First, we have unsatisfactory experiences in life; second, these experiences have causes; third, it is possible to remove these causes and their consequent difficulties, thus arriving at a state of lasting happiness; and fourth, there is a path or method to do this. ☺

– Ven Thubten Chodron
Extracted from *Open Heart, Clear Mind*
www.thubtenchodron.org
www.sravasti.org

A Fruitful Session for All Who Attended the 5th Buddhism & Science Symposium



Singapore – Given that 2015 was Singapore’s 50th birthday, it was perhaps no surprise that the momentous SG50 theme pervaded the 5th Buddhism & Science Symposium on 3 October 2015.

The first two panel speakers impressed the 800-strong audience on the significance of Singapore’s Golden Jubilee celebration and what mindfulness – the crux of the symposium – can do for the nation as it progresses towards SG100.

The morning opened with a fitting song titled *The Mind is Everything*. The brief performance, which set the tone for the session, was a timely reminder to the participants to practise mindfulness because we are what we think.

The four distinguished panel speakers at the symposium, which was themed “The Mind: The Window to Our Well-Being”, delivered scientifically-proven and thought-provoking content targeted at people from all walks of life, including young students, working adults, parents and caregivers to the elderly.

Growing minds and mental resilience

As the saying goes, the youth are our future. Associate Professor John Wong, Head, Department of Psychological Medicine Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, NUS, briefly explained why the growing minds of adolescents posed both opportunities and challenges.

According to Dr Wong, who was also a senior consultant of child psychiatry at the National University Hospital, the human brain grows most dramatically between the ages of twelve and the twenties. This coincides with many changes in physical, social, family and self-identity aspects.

He added that the focus of his talk was on adolescents’ cognitive development: how they think about possibilities, plan ahead and work through hypotheses and push social or legal tolerance beyond conventional limits.

Adolescents, he said, are the push for Singapore in achieving SG100. Hence nurturing and understanding them now will produce payoffs in the future.

In nurturing children, parents might wish to pay heed to the results of a study that Dr Wong cited. The study of 60 Asian adolescents aged 13 to 19 and their parents or main caregivers found that parenting styles in Singapore tended to be overprotective and authoritarian.



Still on Singapore’s Golden Jubilee celebration, Professor Kua Ee Heok who is the Tan Geok Yin Professor of Psychiatry & Neuroscience, Department of Psychological Medicine, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, NUS, posed a rhetorical question to the audience: Will Singapore make it towards SG100?

The senior consulting psychiatrist at National University Hospital, noted that while Singapore has surged past former fellow British colonies in its economic development, its success is not rooted in its economy but its mental resilience and creativity.

On cultivating mental resilience, he took the opportunity to remind the audience that all of us are descendants of the World War II generation, who lived through the war.

Furthermore, he cited The Jurong Ageing Study 2014, which showed that mindfulness, as well as exercise, can improve concentration and curb depressive conditions in the elderly.

According to Dr Kua, the study was mentioned in the distinguished international medical journal, *Lancet*.

Tagged as “Preventive Medicine in the Community by the Community for the Community”, the study found that the participants in a mindfulness awareness practice group fared better in neuro-psychological tests, especially in recognition, than those who received only health education.

The first group of people also saw the lengthening of their telomeres, which are the ends of chromosomes that shorten with age, thereby triggering the onset of age-related diseases.

In conclusion, Dr Kua said, “We can use a non-drug approach, that is, mindfulness and exercise, to improve concentration and depressive conditions in the elderly.

Buddhist way of mindfulness

Asymposium on Buddhism would not be complete without some commonsensical but profound advice on cultivating mindfulness.

Venerable Dr Somaloka, Founder, Mindfulness Meditation and Counselling Centre, Sydney, addressed this swiftly with a cogent and succinct answer.

He said the paradox of studying minds and beings is that we cannot study the mind unless we pay attention to it.

He said, “We own our psychological problems. So if there’s a way to disassociate the ownership, we can alleviate the problem. Therefore, it’s important to detach self from the problem and see what is really happening.”

Meanwhile, eminent meditation teacher and Buddhist scholar, Dr B. Alan Wallace challenged the audience to work their minds and choose between different types of well-being.

He asked: “There are many gyms but where are the gyms to cultivate mental well-being?” He defined well-being in two ways. First, physical well-being is manifested in looks, vitality and health. Then, there’s mental well-being.

To illustrate his point, he juxtaposed a mental image of a successful but depressed, resentful and anxious person with one who is old, pot-bellied, not good-looking but cheerful and benevolent.

He also drew another distinction between *hedonia* – pleasure derived from the world, power and prestige and from consumption and acquisition – and *eudaimonia*, which focuses on deriving genuine happiness from the well-being we bring to the world.

To transform an unruly mind, he said one must first have the aspiration to want to do it. And we would be more successful if we employ cognitive intelligence, which involves practising self-awareness of the impact of our desires on ourselves and others, cultivate attention skills and value *eudaimonia*. ☺

text : Janice Goh



Scan and catch the Buddhism & Science Symposium on video!

Transforming the Mind with Compassion & Mindfulness

Jack Kornfield, a well-known meditation teacher since 1974 and a prolific best-selling author in the Vipassana movement in American Theravada Buddhism speaks to Esther Thien on the power of compassion and mindfulness to change our lives.



Awaken: You have come a long way being a Buddhist teacher. Could you share with our readers what inspired you back then in your youth to train as a Buddhist monk and study under Luang Por Ajahn Chah?

Jack: As a young man, I began my university studies to become a doctor. Then I encountered the Buddhist teachings and was inspired by the Noble Truths leading to the end of suffering. At that time, there was a great deal of pain in my family. I had a violent and abusive father and other difficulties, hence I really needed to find inner peace as well as understand meaningfully what I had experienced. I volunteered to join the Peace Corps to work on rural tropical medicine teams in Thailand, because it was a Buddhist country where I could find a teacher. By chance, I encountered Ajahn Sumedho who had just returned from his first year with Ajahn Chah. He explained that Ajahn Chah was a wise teacher who demanded a lot from his students. This was just what I was looking for, so I set out to find him and begin my studies with him.

Awaken: You have studied under many great teachers. Please you tell us what is common amongst them and what is different?

Jack: While I have studied with many great teachers, the best of them all point directly to the nature of the mind itself. **Discovering that the true core of our entire being is emptiness, compassion and awareness itself brings true liberation. They used many different skilful means to help release clinging and identification with the small sense of self. And all of them pointed to an inner freedom of spirit that is not limited by the ever-changing circumstances of the world.**

Awaken: More and more Westerners are sitting up and starting to study the Buddhist teachings in-depth, yet many youngsters in Asian societies perceived Buddhism to be old-fashioned and passé. Why do you think there is such a shift?

Jack: There is a huge wave of interest in mindfulness, compassion and Buddhist teachings across America. Young people especially are excited and interested to learn the Dharma. This is because they have experienced the increase in stress, materialism, environmental destruction, unhealthy competition, and lack of meaning in modern society and want a way to live more happily and wisely.

They have seen that in recent decades, Buddhist practices have been validated by thousands of neuroscience studies. They have been scientifically proven to reduce stress, build emotional resilience, develop steadiness and inner strength and foster loving-kindness and well-being. So now, trainings on mindfulness and compassion are being incorporated into thousands of school systems, medical clinics, and used in business, athletics, the arts, law and many other places.

Perhaps the reason that youngsters in Asian societies see Buddhism as old-fashioned and passé is because their grandparents' main form of practice was mostly devotional. They would go to the temples to pray and give offerings in hope for a better life. Rarely did this include learning the transformative Buddhist practices of mindfulness, compassion, wisdom and joy, which were more reserved for the monks and nuns. Now it is clear that the whole world needs these practices, and young people in the West are experiencing their benefits.

Awaken: Last year, you conducted a retreat here in Singapore at KMSPKS Monastery called "The Power of Mindfulness and Compassion in the Modern World". What exactly is that power and how would you describe this power to someone who is completely new to mindfulness?

Jack: The power of mindfulness is its wonderful capacity to make the mind balanced and clear in any situation. Instead of getting caught up by stress, worry and reactions, we become peaceful and centred. Then, regardless of the difficulties facing us, we can see more clearly and wisely, and tend to ourselves and the world around us in a wise and empowered way.

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Awaken: Transformation of the heart and mind is so important in the spiritual path. How can one initiate this process and stay on course for transformation?

Jack: The Buddha and all great teachings show us that a positive transformation of the heart and mind is possible for us. We can grow in wise understanding and compassion. But it doesn't happen by accident. It comes about through developing the mind and heart, through practising inner trainings like those of mindfulness, compassion, courage, patience, ethics and loving-kindness. If you can find a place to learn these methods, they will change your life.

Awaken: Does someone who meditate, or is mindful at all times, no longer suffer?

Jack: Ahh, an interesting and idealist question. Alas, I'm not mindful ALL THE TIME, and I'm not sure I have met anyone else who is, so I can't answer this question. But I can say this for certain: The more we live with mindfulness, the less we suffer. And this can change your whole life!

Awaken: In your own spiritual journey as a meditation teacher for many decades, what is the one thing that strikes you, working with people and their pain, difficulties and unhappiness?

Jack: An essential quality needed on the spiritual journey is self-compassion. The spiritual path is neither a grim duty, nor another place to reinforce self-criticism and judgement. It is a way to develop loving-kindness, first for yourself, and then for all those you meet. Wisdom and understanding only deepen and ripen in the heart and mind when they are cultivated in a field of love.

Awaken: I really like the river analogy you mentioned in a teaching of yours. Could you elaborate further for our readers' benefit?

Jack: The Buddha taught that we are made of five *skandas* or rivers of experience. We are an ever-changing river of senses, a river of feelings, a river of perceptions, a river of thoughts and a river of consciousness. When we realise that who we are including all things around us are flowing like fluctuating rivers, instead of grasping, we can relax and find a peaceful composure amidst it all, and then act from clarity and care rather than from a fear of change.

Awaken: What is the one take-home message you would like to share with our readers regarding the Buddhist path?

Jack: Singapore and Asia have a magnificent long history of Dharma, wisdom and inner development. Our modern lives and the modern world need this more than anything else. **The outer material successes won't bring happiness unless they are also married to a wise and peaceful heart. The beautiful thing is, these qualities can be learned.** Training in mindfulness and compassion will change your life and will also help you navigate and bring wisdom to the modern world. ☺

text : Janice Goh

Practising the Dharma for me, to be honest, is not a bed full of roses. It is a bed full of thorny roses. Why do I say that?

In our society, everyone, including myself, wants to be seen as a good person. To be seen as someone to be admired and be inspired by.

However, practising the Dharma is akin to having the light of wisdom shines into your heart. It lets you see clearly who you are for the first time. The wisdom breaks down all your walls and masks - if you are brave enough to allow it to do so.

That is when you truly face all your inner insecurities, fears, doubt and anger. That is when you realise that you have opened a can of worms, that is, life experiences that you might have chosen not to deal with.

Yet, greater happiness and peace can only come about by choosing to relook the past through the wisdom eye of the Dharma.

By being mindful and aware of the feelings and thoughts when they arise, I am given a chance to apply the Dharma medicine my teacher had taught me.

By accepting the thorns of my stubbornness, self-righteousness and whatever I find about myself, I have started to feel a sense of peace within me.

My heart begins to heal.

Loving-kindness and compassion are not only given to others who need them from me; it is about giving it to myself, too.

Why? Because I am a being too, and I have neglected this fact.

Only by understanding the need to water the roses of my own heart with loving-kindness and compassion can I truly let the light of my own Buddha-nature shine bigger and brighter.

As my teacher taught, "Put Dharma into your daily life. Be the Living Dharma."

This teaching has since become my inspiration and reminder to live my life in accordance with the Dharma.

May all beings be well and happy. ☺

- by Vera Lim, aged 36 years, senior business adviser

How does practising
the Buddha's teachings
bring you greater happiness,
relaxation and peace of mind?





Tips for a Happy Life

Venerable Thubten Chodron, founder and abbess of Sravasti Abbey (Washington State, USA) shared seven tips on how to lead a happy life with Buddhist youth in Singapore. Drawing on her personal experience, Ven Chodron offered several strategies that Buddhist youth can keep in mind to strengthen their practice and lead truly happy lives.

Below is an excerpt from Ven. Chodron's talks.

I was asked to speak about "Seven Tips for a Happy Life," but I had a hard time narrowing the tips down to just seven! Actually there are many more, and hopefully as you live with mindfulness, wisdom and compassion, you'll become aware of the others too.

1. Live without hypocrisy

Many of us go through life being extremely attached to what other people think of us. Most of us try to look good and try to make others think positively of us. We spend a lot of our time just trying to be what we think others think we should be, and this makes us crazy because everybody expects us to be something different. Besides, what is our motivation when we try to be what we think others think we should be? Are we acting with sincerity, or are we trying to be people-pleasers? Are we simply putting on a good show so that other people will say good things about us?

We can act and create personal images, and other people may even believe that we are what we pretend to be. However, that does not have any real meaning in our lives because we are the ones who have to live with ourselves. We know when we've been phoney and even though others may praise us for the persona we've created, that doesn't make us feel good about ourselves. Inside we know we're being fake. We're much happier when we are sincere and feel comfortable with who we are.

Being a hypocrite does not work because the karmic results of our actions depend on our intention. **Our motivation is the key that determines whether what we do is meaningful and beneficial.** Even if we look like we're very kind and considerate, when our motivation is just to get people to like us, our actions aren't truly kind. Why so? It is because our motivation is concerned with our own popularity, not with benefiting others. On the other hand, we may act with a genuinely kind motivation but people misinterpret our actions and get upset. In this case, we don't need to doubt ourselves because our intention was good, even though we may need to learn to be more skilful in our actions.

Furthermore, we want to learn to derive happiness from doing the action, not from receiving others' praise afterwards. For example, in spiritual practice we want to train our minds to take delight in giving. When we take delight in giving, then regardless of where we are and who we give to, we feel happy. It does not matter whether the other person says thank you or not, because our happiness does not come from the recognition we receive but from the deed of giving.

2. Reflect on your motivation and cultivate an expansive motivation

We should constantly reflect on our motivations. Some of the questions we can ask ourselves include:

- What is the thought motivating what I'm about to say or do? Is there the intention to harm someone? Or is there the intention to benefit others? Am I doing things to impress others or out of peer pressure?
- Am I doing something for my own self-gain, or am I doing something out of genuine care for other living beings? Or it is a mix?
- Am I trying to do what other people think I should do, or am I really in touch with myself and know what is best for me to do?
- In discerning what I feel is best for me to do, am I operating out of attachment or anger, or am I operating out of kindness and wisdom?

Besides the process of looking inside and seeing what our motivation is, we can also consciously cultivate a more expansive motivation. **An expansive motivation is one that aspires for the benefit and welfare of other living beings.** Caring about others does not mean we neglect ourselves or make ourselves suffer. **Self-respect is important, but we want to go beyond self-indulgent motivations and see that all living beings are interdependent. Our actions affect others, and because we see that everyone wants happiness and wants to avoid suffering as intensely as we do, we care about the effects of our words and deeds on others.**

Most people tend to be quite self-centred, so our initial motivation is not always for the welfare of other living beings. Especially when we refer to ALL living beings, which include the ones we cannot stand! So we need to stretch our mind and our motivation.

In order to cultivate an expansive motivation, such as the motivation to become a fully awakened Buddha, we will need to learn what a Buddha is, how it is possible for us to become a Buddha, what are the steps of the path for becoming a Buddha, and what benefits do we bring to ourselves and others by becoming a Buddha. The more we understand these things, the more expansive our motivation will grow and shine within us.

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3. Set wise priorities

One of the most important activities in our life is to set good priorities; to know what in life is most important to us. We have received so much conditioning throughout our lives that it takes some time to discern for ourselves what we think is valuable. Our parents teach us to value X, Y and Z; our teachers encourage us to think A, B and C. Advertising tells us who we should be and what we should look like. All the time, we are getting messages about who we should be, what we should do and what we should have. But how often do we ever think about whether we really want to be, do, or have those things? **How often do we ever think about what actually nourishes our hearts in a truly joyful, vibrant and beautiful way?**

We want to live; we want to be vibrant! We do not want to live on auto-pilot, like a push-button robot that operates on others' commands. We have dreams and aspirations. We want to choose what we do in life because we have passion for that activity or field. What is your passion? How do you want to contribute? What is your unique talent or ability, and how can you use it to make a difference in the lives of others?

When we set wise priorities, we will choose activities that are for the long-term benefit of ourselves and others. When I need to make a decision, I use a particular set of criteria to evaluate which direction to take.

First, I consider, "Which situation is most conducive for me to keep good ethical conduct?" I want to make sure I don't hurt others or myself, and keeping good ethical conduct is important for that.

If we sincerely try to live an ethical life, even though we do not make as much money or have as nice a house as the next person, when we go to bed at night, we feel peaceful. **Our mind is calm and free from self-doubt and self-loathing. That inner peace is worth more than anything else we could ever have. Plus, no one else can take our inner peace away from us.**

Second, I examine, "Which situation will enable me to be of greatest benefit to other living beings in the long term?" Since another one of my priorities is benefiting others, I evaluate the various options in front of me to discern which one will enable me to do that. Which situation will make it easier for me to cultivate a kind, compassionate and altruistic attitude?

Sometimes our priorities are not what others think they should be. In such a situation, if our priorities are not selfish and they are for the long-term benefit of ourselves and others, then even if other people do not like what we are doing, it really does not matter because we know we are living in a good way. We are confident within ourselves that our priorities will lead to the long-term benefit of others.

4. Keeping ourselves balanced

To keep ourselves balanced on a day-to-day basis, we first need to maintain good health. This means we need to eat well, have sufficient sleep and regular exercise. We also need to engage in activities that nourish us. Spending time with people we care about nourishes us. In my observation, what most people really want is connection with other living beings. Take the time to be with your family and with people you care about.

Cultivate the friendships of people who have good values, people who you can learn from, and people who will be good role models for you.

Nowadays people walking down the street are all looking at their cellphones, colliding with real human beings while texting people who are not there. Sometimes we need to turn off our technology and tune in to the real living human beings who are surrounding us. So much of our communication is through non-verbal cues – our body language, how we move our hands, how we sit, what we do with our eyes, the tone of our voice, the volume of our voice. Yet many children and young adults now are growing up without being sensitive to those kinds of things because they are hardly ever around real living people. They are always in their two-by-four universe, texting on their phones.

5. Befriend yourself

Sometimes when we are alone, we have thoughts such as "Oh, I am a failure! I cannot do anything right! I'm worthless, no wonder nobody loves me!" This low self-esteem is one of our biggest hindrances on the path to full awakening. We live with ourselves 24/7 but we do not even know who we are and how to be our own friend. We constantly judge ourselves using standards that we've never examined to determine if they are realistic or not. We compare ourselves with others and always come out losers.

None of us are perfect; we all have faults. That is normal and we do not need to berate ourselves for our faults or think that we are our faults. Our self-image is exaggerated because we don't really know who we are. We need to learn to be our own friend and accept ourselves, "Yes, I have faults and I'm working on them, and yes, I have many good qualities, abilities and talents too. I'm a worthwhile person because I have the Buddha-nature, the potential to become a fully awakened Buddha. Even now, I can contribute to others' well-being."

Meditation and the study of Buddhist teachings will help us become friends with ourselves. To overcome low self-esteem, we should contemplate our precious human life and Buddha-nature. Doing so enables us to understand that the fundamental nature of our mind is pure and undefiled. The nature of our mind is like the wide open sky—totally spacious and free. Mental afflictions such as ignorance, anger, attachment, pride, jealousy, laziness, confusion, conceit and so on are like clouds in the sky. When the clouds are in the sky, we cannot see the clear, open, wide and spacious nature of the sky. The sky is still there, it is just hidden from our view at that time. Similarly, sometimes we might become discouraged or confused, but all those emotions and thoughts are not who we are. They are like the clouds in the sky. The pure nature of our mind is still there. It is temporarily hidden, and when the wind of wisdom and compassion comes and blows the cloud-like disturbing emotions away, we see the wide open, free sky.

Take some time each day to sit quietly and do a spiritual practice. To do a daily meditation practice, learn the Buddha's teachings and spend some time alone each day reflecting on your life. Observe your thoughts and learn to discern realistic and beneficial ones from unrealistic and harmful ones. Understand how your thoughts created your emotions. Give yourself some space to accept and appreciate yourself for who you are. You don't need to be the perfect, number one whatever-type-of-person-you-think-you-should-be. You can relax and be you, with all the complexities of the sentient being you are.

Then you can tap into your potential and unlock all sorts of doors to help you understand yourself. The Buddha taught many techniques for overcoming disturbing emotions, transforming negative thoughts and removing wrong views. You can learn these and learn how to apply them to your mind, how to work with your own mind so that it becomes clearer and calmer, how to open your heart in kindness towards yourself as well as towards others. In the process of doing this, you will become your own friend.

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6. It's not all about me

Nowadays we think everything is about us. There's even a magazine called "Self" and another one called "Me." We buy products named "iPhones" and "iPads", and from the time we are little kids the advertising industry conditions us to always search for the most pleasure, prestige, possessions, popularity and so forth. We have this idea that it is all about me! My pleasure and pain are more important than anyone else's.

Think about what makes you upset. When your friends get criticised, you usually don't get upset, but when somebody says the same words of criticism to you, it becomes a big deal. Similarly, when your neighbour's child fails his spelling test, it doesn't bother you, but when your child fails his spelling test, it is a catastrophe! Our mind gets incredibly upset by anything that happens to us or is related to us. We see everything in the world through the narrow periscope of "Me, I, My, and Mine". Why is it a narrow periscope? Because there are over seven billion people on this planet and we think we are the most important. It would be really good if we can chill a little bit and have as one of our slogans – "It is not all about me".

This self-centredness causes us so much misery. When we suffer from fear, anxiety and worry, it is because we are paying too much attention to ourselves in a very unhealthy way. Nothing has happened, but we sit there thinking, "What if this happens? What if that happens?" when in reality, nothing has happened. Experiencing fear, anxiety and worry is definitely suffering, and the source of this suffering is our self-preoccupation.

Our self-centred thought is not who we are. It is not an inherent part of us; it is something added on to the pure nature of our mind and it can be eliminated. Initially we may be afraid to let go of our self-preoccupation, "If I don't hold myself first and foremost, I will fall behind. People will take advantage of me. I won't be a success." But when we examine these fears, we see that they are not true; the world isn't going to crash if we release our self-centredness and open our hearts to care about others. We can still be successful without being so self-preoccupied, and we'll be a lot happier too. For example, if we reach out and help others—friends, strangers, and enemies—they'll be a lot nicer to us, and our own lives will be happier.

7. Cultivate a kind heart

As a corollary to "It is not all about me", we want to cultivate kindness. To do this, we reflect on the benefit we have received from so many people and animals too. When we contemplate the kindness of other living beings, we see that we can benefit from whatever somebody does if we know how to think about it properly. Even if somebody is harming us, we can see it as kindness, because by putting us in a difficult position, they are challenging us and helping us to grow. They are helping us to find qualities and resources within ourselves that we did not know we had, making us stronger.

It is easy to think of the kindness of our family and friends, but what about the kindness of strangers? Actually we receive benefit from so many people we do not know. When we look around, everything we use comes due to the kindness of others – the construction workers who built the building, the farmers who grew the vegetables, the electricians, plumbers, secretaries and so forth all play important roles that enable society to run smoothly.

For example, I was once in a city where all the garbage collectors were on strike. That really helped me to see the kindness of the garbage collectors, so now I stop and thank them for their work when I walk down the street.

We benefit from all the different kinds of work that others do. All the people we see around us – on the bus, on the subway, in the stores – are the people who are making the things we use and doing the services we benefit from on a day-to-day basis. Hence, when looking at the people around us, let's consider their kindness and the benefit we've received from them. In turn, let's regard them with eyes of kindness, and with awareness of how dependent we are on others just to stay alive, let's reach out and be kind to them in return.

If you have a kind heart, you will be honest in your business dealings because you care about the welfare of your clients and customers. You know that if you lie to them or cheat them, they will not trust you and will not do business with you again in the future. In addition, they will tell others about your unscrupulous actions. However, if you help your clients and customers, they will trust and have confidence in you. You will have good relationships with them that will last for many years and will be mutually beneficial.

When cultivating kindness, we should also learn to be trustworthy. When somebody tells you something in confidence, keep it in confidence. When you make a promise, do your best to keep the promise. We have to look beyond our own immediate gratification and learn how to be a good friend. Consider, "How can I be a good friend? What do I need to do and stop doing in order to be a good friend to others?" As we all want to have friends, let us make ourselves good friends to other people.

Conclusion

Please take some time and think about these seven tips. Don't simply rush off to the next activity, but apply these tips to your life. Imagine thinking or acting according to them. What would that look like? How would you feel? Seeing the benefits of implementing these tips in your life will inspire you to do so. As you do this, you will experience the benefits in both your mental state and your relationships with others. You will enjoy greater mental peace, more satisfaction and deeper connection with others.

Come back to these tips over time. Read this every so often to remind yourself to live without hypocrisy, reflect on your motivation and cultivate an expansive motivation, set wise priorities, keep yourself balanced, befriend yourself, and realise that "it's not all about me" and cultivate a kind heart. ☺

transcribed by : Colette Janning
edited by : Debbie Tan

Kick-start the New Year on a wholesome note.

Try this meaningful family activity on New Year's eve with your older children, teens or other family members and make it a yearly event.

This activity signifies ridding ourselves of our negative qualities. It feels great to start each new year having set the intention to purge ourselves of negative qualities, mental states and emotions, knowing we have the support of the people to whom we are closest to.

1. Gather everyone around.
2. Take out some pencils and strips of paper.
3. Get everyone to write on the paper all the negative qualities (eg pride, frustration, anger, impatience etc) that have prevented them from being happy in the past year.
4. Put all the pieces of paper into a basket on the table.
5. One by one, take turns to pull out a paper strip and read it aloud. Often, the same quality appears many times because more than one of us want to be rid of it.
6. Then shred it up or burn it in a fire.



by : Susan Kaiser Greenland, author of *The Mindful Child*.
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Pushing the Limits: Desire & Imagination in the Buddhist Path

text : Thanissaro Bhikkhu

All phenomena, the Buddha once said, are rooted in desire. Everything we think, say, or do — every experience — comes from desire. Even we come from desire. We were reborn into this life because of our desire to be. Consciously or not, our desires keep redefining our sense of who we are. Desire is how we take our place in the causal matrix of space and time. The only thing not rooted in desire is nirvana, for it's the end of all phenomena and lies even beyond the Buddha's use of the word "all." **But the path that takes you to nirvana is rooted in desire — in skilful desires. The path to liberation pushes the limits of skilful desires to see how far they can go.**

The notion of a skilful desire may sound strange, but a mature mind intuitively pursues the desires it sees as skilful and drops those it perceives as not. Basic in everyone is the desire for happiness. Every other desire is a strategy for attaining that happiness. You want an iPod, a sexual partner, or an experience of inner peace because you think it will make you happy. Because these secondary desires are strategies, they follow a pattern. They spring from an inchoate feeling of lack and limitation; they employ your powers of perception to identify the cause of the limitation; and they use your powers of creative imagination to conceive a solution to it.

But despite their common pattern, desires are not monolithic. Each offers a different perception of what's lacking in life, together with a different picture of what the solution should be. A desire for a sandwich comes from a perception of physical hunger and proposes to solve it with a Swiss-on-rye. A desire to climb a mountain focuses on a different set of hungers — for accomplishment, exhilaration, self-mastery — and appeals to a different image of satisfaction. Whatever the desire, if the solution actually leads to happiness, the desire is skilful. If it doesn't, it's not. However, what seems to be a skilful desire may lead only to a false or transitory happiness not worth the effort entailed. So wisdom starts as a meta-desire: to learn how to recognize skilful and unskilful desires for what they actually are.

Unskilful desires can create suffering in a variety of ways. Sometimes they aim at the impossible: not to grow old or die. Sometimes they focus on possibilities that require distasteful means — such as lying or cheating to get ahead in your job. Or the goal, when you get it, may not really keep you happy. Even the summit of Everest can be a disappointment. Even when it's not, you can't stay there forever. When you leave, you're left with nothing but memories, which can shift and fade. If you did mean or hurtful things to get there, their memory can burn away any pleasure that memories of the summit might hold.

In addition, desires often pull in opposite directions. Your desire for sex, for instance, can get in the way of your desire for peace. In fact, conflict among desires is what alerts us to how painful desire can be. It's also what has taught each desire how to speak, to persuade, to argue or bully its way into power. And just because a desire is skilful doesn't mean it's more skilful at arguing its case than the unskilful ones, for those can often be the most intransigent, the most strident, the slickest in having their way. This means that wisdom has to learn how to strategize, too, to strengthen skilful desires so that less skilful desires will listen to them. That way desires can be trained to work together towards greater happiness. This is how a mature and healthy mind works: conducting a dialogue not so much between reason and desire as between responsible desires and irresponsible ones.

But even in a mature mind, the dialogue often yields compromises that don't really go to the heart: snatches of sensual pleasure, glimpses of spiritual peace, nothing really satisfying and whole. Some people, growing impatient with compromise, turn a deaf ear to prudent desires and tune into demands for instant gratification — all the sex, power, and money they can grab. But when the rampage of gratification wears itself out, the damage can take lifetimes to set right. Other people try their best to accept the compromise among desires, trying to find a measure of peace in not reaching for what they see as impossible. But this peace, too, depends on a deaf inner ear, denying the underlying truth of all desires: that a life of endless limitations is intolerable.

Both sorts of people share a common assumption that true, unlimited happiness lies beyond reach. Their imaginations are so stunted that they can't even conceive of what a true, unlimited happiness in this lifetime would be.

What made the Buddha special was that he never lowered his expectations. He imagined the ultimate happiness — one so free from limit and lack that it would leave no need for further desire — and then treasured his desire for that happiness as his highest priority. Bringing all his other desires into dialogue with it, he explored various strategies until finding one that actually attained that unlimited goal. This strategy became his most basic teaching: the Four Noble Truths.

Most of us, when looking at the Four Noble Truths, don't realize that they're all about desire. We're taught that the Buddha gave only one role to desire — as the cause of suffering. Because he says to abandon the cause of suffering, it sounds like he's denying any positive role to desire and its constructive companions: creativity, imagination and hope. This perception, though, misses two important points. **The first is that all four truths speak to the basic dynamic of desire on its own terms: perception of lack and limitation, the imagination of a solution, and a strategy for attaining it. The first truth teaches the basic lack and limitation in our lives — the clinging that constitutes suffering — while the second truth points to the types of desires that lead to clinging: desires for sensuality, becoming, and annihilation. The third truth expands our imagination to encompass the possibility that clinging can be totally overcome. The fourth truth, the path to the end of suffering, shows how to strategize so as to overcome clinging by abandoning its cause.**

The second point that's often missed is that the noble truths give two roles to desire, depending on whether it's skilful or not. Unskilful desire is the cause of suffering; skilful desire forms part of the path to its cessation. Skilful desire undercuts unskilful desire, not by repressing it, but by producing greater and greater levels of satisfaction and well-being so that unskilful desire has no place to stand. This strategy of skilful desire is explicit in the path factor of right effort:

What is right effort? There is the case where a monk (*here meaning any meditator*) generates desire, endeavours, arouses persistence, upholds and exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskilful mental qualities that have not yet arisen... for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskilful qualities that have arisen... for the sake of the arising of skilful qualities that have not yet arisen... for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, and culmination of skilful qualities that have arisen. This is called right effort.

— DN 22

As this formula shows, the crucial elements for replacing unskilful mental qualities with skilful ones are desire, persistence, and intent. Desire gives the initial impetus and focus for right effort, while persistence provides staying power. Intent is the most complex factor of the three. The Pali word here, *citta*, also means "mind," and in this context it means giving your whole mind to the work at hand: all your powers of sensitivity, intelligence, discernment and ingenuity. You don't want your mind to be split on this issue; you want all of its powers working together on the same side.

These three qualities — desire, persistence and intent — underlie every attempt to master a skill. So it's useful, in undertaking the path, to reflect on how you've used these qualities to master skills in the past. The Buddha made this point in his many similes comparing the person on the path to a master craftsman — a musician, carpenter, surgeon, acrobat, cook. As with any skill, there are many steps to developing the path, but four stand out.

The first is to use your ingenuity to fight off the chorus of inner voices trying to dissuade you from making the effort to be skilful in the first place. These voices are like devious lawyers representing strongly entrenched interests: all your threatened unskilful desires. You have to be quick and alert in countering their arguments, for they can come from all sides, sounding honest and wise even though they're not. Here are some of the arguments these voices may propose, along with a few effective responses:

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Trying to manipulate your desires like this is unnatural. Actually, you're already manipulating your desires all the time, when you choose one desire over another, so you might as well learn to do it skilfully. And there are plenty of people out there only too happy to manipulate your desires for you — think of all the advertisements clamouring for your attention — so it's better to put the manipulation in more trustworthy hands: your own.

Trying to change your desires is an attack on your very self. This argument works only if you give your sense of self — which is really just a grab bag of desires — more solidity than it deserves. You can turn the argument on its head by noting that since your "self" is a perpetually changing line-up of strategies for happiness, you might as well try changing it in a direction more likely to achieve true happiness.

To think of "skilful" and "unskilful" desires is dualistic and judgmental. You don't want non-dualistic mechanics working on your car, or non-dualistic surgeons operating on your brain. You want people who can tell what's skilful from what's not. If you really value your happiness, you'll demand the same discernment in the person most responsible for it: yourself.

It's too goal-oriented. Just accept things as they are in the present. Every desire tells you that things in the present are limited and lacking. You either accept the desire or accept the lack. To accept both at once is to deny that either has any real truth. To try to dwell peacefully in the tension between the two — in a "path of no craving" to be rid of either — is what the Buddha called limited equanimity, and what one Thai forest master called the equanimity of a cow.

It's a futile attempt to resist such a divine and mysterious power. Desire seems overwhelming and mysterious simply because we don't know our minds. And where would we be if we kept slapping the term "divine" or "cosmic" on forces we didn't understand?

Arguing with unskilful desires is too much work. Consider the alternative: an endless wandering from one set of limitations to another, continually seeking happiness and yet finding it always slipping from your grasp, repeatedly taking a stance for one desire one moment and shifting to another desire the next. Right effort at least gives you one steady place to stand. It's not adding a more demanding desire to the chaotic mix; it's offering a way to sort out the mess. And the Buddha's path holds open the hope of an unlimited happiness, preceded by increasingly refined and reliable levels of happiness all along the path. In short, his alternative is actually the one that's more enjoyable and involves less work.

Once you've silenced these voices, the next step is to take responsibility for your actions and their consequences. This requires being willing to learn from your mistakes. Several years ago, a sociologist studied students in a neurosurgery program to see what qualities separated those who succeeded from those who failed. He found ultimately that two questions in his interviews pointed to the crucial difference. He would ask the students, "Do you ever make mistakes? If so, what is the worst mistake you've ever made?" Those who failed the program would inevitably answer that they rarely made mistakes or else would blame their mistakes on factors beyond their control. Those who succeeded in the program not only admitted to many mistakes but also volunteered information on what they would do not to repeat those mistakes in the future.

The Buddha encouraged this same mature attitude in his first instructions to his son, Rahula. He told Rahula to focus on his intentions before acting, and on the results of his actions both while he was doing them and after they were done. If Rahula saw that his intentions would lead to harm for himself or others, he shouldn't act on them. If he saw that his thoughts, words, or deeds actually produced harm, he should stop them and resolve never to repeat them, without at the same time falling into remorse. If, on the other hand, he saw no harmful consequences from his actions, he should take joy in his progress on the path, and use that joy to nourish his continued practice.

Although the Buddha aimed these instructions at a seven-year-old child, the pattern they outline informs every level of the practice. The whole path to awakening consists of sticking to the desire always to do the most skilful thing; it develops as your sense of "skilful" gets more refined. If you act on an unskilful desire, take responsibility for the consequences, using them to educate that desire as to where it went wrong. Although desires can be remarkably stubborn, they share a common goal — happiness — and this can form the common ground for an effective dialogue: If a desire doesn't really produce happiness, it contradicts its reason for being.

The best way to make this point is to keep tracing the thread from the desire to its resulting actions, and from the actions to their consequences. If the desire aimed at a happiness that caused suffering to others, notice how their corresponding desire for happiness leads them to undermine the happiness you sought. If the desire is aimed at happiness based on things that can age, grow ill, die, or leave you, notice how that fact sets you up for a fall. Then notice how the distress that comes from acting on this sort of desire is universal. It's not just you. Everyone who has acted, is acting, or will act on that desire has suffered in the past, is suffering right now, and will suffer in the future. There's no way around it.

Reflecting this way helps to weaken the "why me?" tendency that aggravates suffering and makes you cling fiercely to the desire causing it. It also helps develop two important attitudes that strengthen skilful desires: a sense of dismay (*samvega*) over the universality of suffering, and an attitude of heedfulness (*appamada*) to avoid being duped by that particular type of desire again.

Unskilful desires don't really give way, though, until you can show that other, less troublesome desires actually can produce greater happiness. This is why the Buddha emphasizes learning how to appreciate the rewards of a virtuous, generous life: the joy in fostering the happiness of others, the solid dignity and self-worth in doing the hard but the right thing. It's also why his path centres on states of blissful, refreshing concentration. Accessing this refreshment in your meditation gives you immediate, visceral proof that the Buddha was no killjoy. The desires he recommends really do produce a happiness that can give you the strength to keep on choosing the skilful path.

That's the next step: patiently and persistently sticking with the desire to do the skilful thing in all situations. This isn't a matter of sheer effort. As any good sports coach will tell you, hours of practice don't necessarily guarantee results. You have to combine your persistence with intent: sensitivity, discernment, ingenuity. Keep an eye out for how to do things more efficiently. Try to see patterns in what you do. At the same time, introduce play and variety into your practice so that the plateaus don't get boring, and the downs don't get you down.

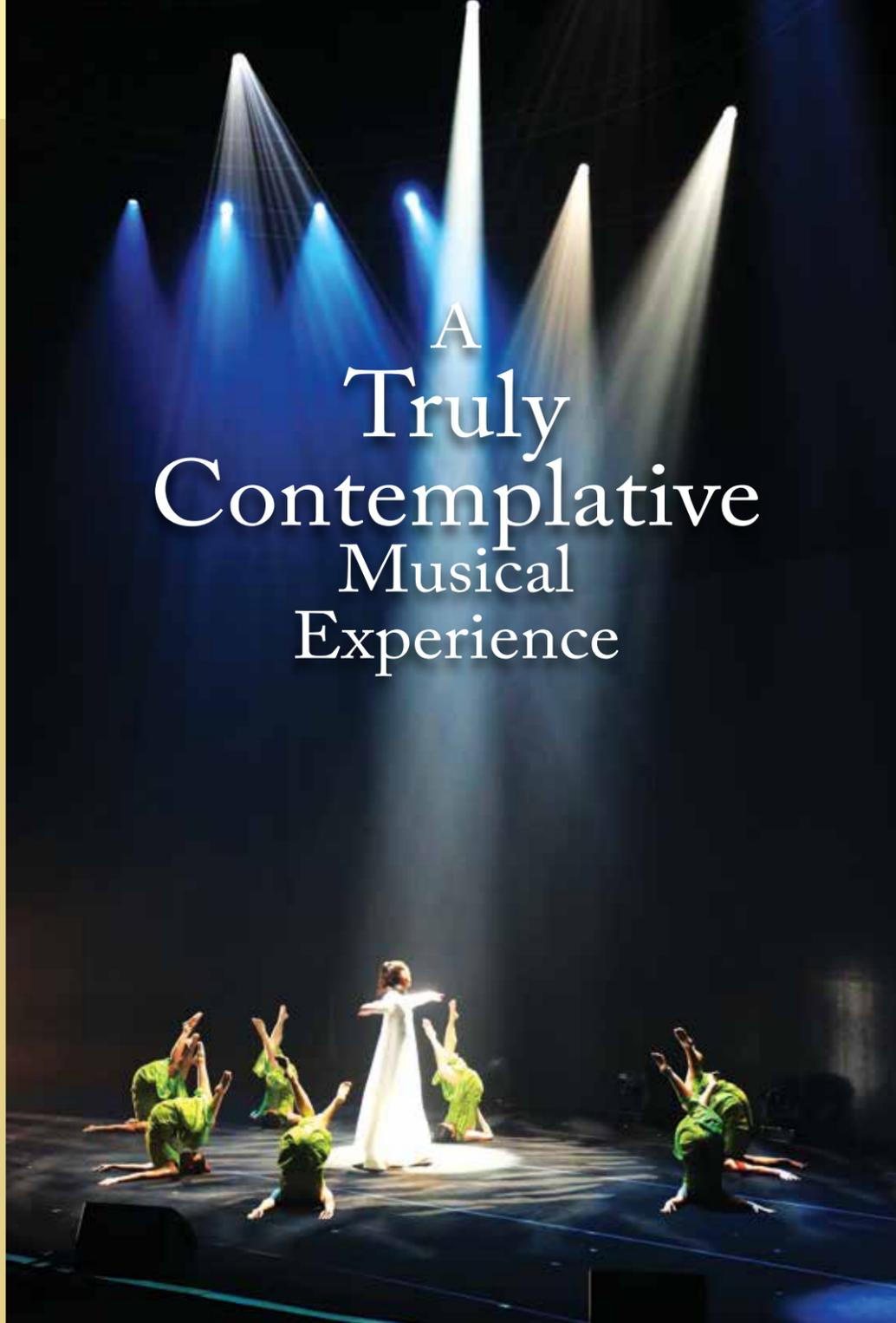
The Buddha makes similar points in his meditation instructions. Once you've mastered a state of concentration, see where it still contains elements of stress. Then look for patterns to that stress: what are you doing to cause it? Find ways to gladden the mind when it's down, to liberate it from its confinements, to steady it when it gets restless. In this way, as you learn to enjoy rising to the challenges of meditation, you also gain familiarity with subtle patterns of cause and effect in the mind.

The fourth step, once you've mastered those patterns, is to push their limits. Again, this isn't simply a matter of increased effort. It's more a rekindling of your imagination to explore the unexpected side-alleys of cause and effect. A famous cellist once said that his most exhilarating concert was one in which he broke a string on his cello and decided to finish the piece he was playing on the remaining strings, refiguring it on the spot. The most obvious strings in meditation are the specific techniques for fostering stillness and insight, but the more interesting ones are the assumptions that underlie the quest for skill: lack, strategy, dialogue, your sense of self. Can you learn to do without them? There comes a point in your meditation when the only way for greater happiness is to begin questioning these assumptions. And this leads to some intriguing paradoxes: If desire springs from a sense of lack or limitation, what happens to desire when it produces happiness with no lack or limitation at all? What's it like not to need desire? What would happen to your inner dialogue, your sense of self? And if desire is how you take your place in space and time, what happens to space and time when desire is absent?

The Buddha encouraged these queries by describing the awakened person as so undefined and unlimited that he or she couldn't be located in the present life or be described after this life as existing, not existing, neither, or both. This may sound like an abstract and unreachable goal, but the Buddha demonstrated its human face in the example of his person. Having pushed past the limits of cause and effect, he was still able to function admirably within them, in this life, happy in even the most difficult circumstances, compassionately teaching people of every sort. And there's his testimony that not only monks and nuns, but also lay people — even children — had developed their skilful desires to the point where they gained a taste of awakening as well.

So imagine that. And listen to any desire that would take you in that direction, for that's your path to true happiness. ☺

A Truly Contemplative Musical Experience



“Disconcerting” was my initial confused response on learning that there would be a Buddhist concert. After all, what has Buddhism to do with a spectacular show incorporating visual and auditory stimulation in the forms of hypnotic music, alluring dance, dazzling lights and flickering images projected on a high-resolution screen? It seemed to be a complete antithesis to all that the Buddha had taught about mind training. Didn’t serious Buddhists abiding by the Eight Precepts “undertake to refrain from dancing, singing, music, watching entertainment, wearing garlands, using perfumes, and beautifying the body with cosmetics”?

Nonetheless, in the spirit of keeping my mind open to investigate such an experience for myself – *ehipassiko* (come and see), as the Buddha advised – I gamely found myself in the Esplanade Concert Hall for Imee Ooi’s Sound of Wisdom World Tour Concert in Singapore on 26 November 2015. The Singapore concert was the second in a World Tour, following a highly-successful premiere in Malaysia attended by almost 9,000 fans. The Singapore performance was a fundraiser for the Bright Hill Evergreen Home which provides shelter and nursing care to the disadvantaged and aged sick regardless of race, language or religion.

Fittingly, the highlight of the Singapore tour was a special performance by Venerable Kwang Sheng, Chairman of Bright Hill Evergreen Home and Abbot of Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery, who gave an impeccable rendition of “The Compassion of The Garuda” on the violin.

The programme was then followed by a medley of piano or violin solo performances, modern dances, singing and a quasi-musical in tribute to Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. The evening passed breezily with Imee and/or the other performers crooning various sutras, dharanis or mantras to music. The subdued monochromatic colour scheme predominant of the performers’ outfits contrasted soothingly against the bright, neon screen displays. The all-male Dharma Guardians inevitably sounded like choir boys with their baritone recitals, conjuring images of an East-West fusion.

I observed that applause was reserved for the well-known chants or those performances for which Imee provided explanations. I wondered how a non-Buddhist (assuming one would attend a Buddhist concert) would make sense of this rather surreal experience, akin to being in a dream where everyone else speaks a foreign language you

do not know (*Sanskrit, Pali or Tibetan* in this case). Can we truly appreciate something that we do not completely understand? Or is high art by definition that which cannot be understood? Then again, all over the world, people enjoy Italian operas without understanding a word of Italian. Perhaps, therein lies the magic of music and the arts: boundaries are transcended, language is bypassed and we respond at the gut level – thinking is circumvented. In fact, I recall this same logic applied in an argument to encourage Buddhist chanting in its native Pali, rather than in Chinese or one’s local tongue. The mind has to focus while chanting in an unknown language so there is less chance of it wandering.

Some disagreed though. I overheard a conversation between two members of the audience, lamenting that the words in a chant that they so loved were mispronounced. I suppose some deviations from

normal chanting practice were inescapable in setting the Buddhist chants to music. Any creative work requiring personal interpretation means making subtle differences to the subject matter. An orchestra needs a conductor for this precise reason. The conductor interprets or even, re-interprets a musical score that theoretically, any member of the orchestra can play by reading it themselves. As a result, the same musical composition under different conductors may elicit different responses from the same audience.

The remark I overheard set me pondering over how entrenched we are in our habits and ways. We crave the familiar. We can’t help but grasp at conditioned phenomena, including being attached to the way we have always chanted a prayer.

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There were instances during the concert when old-fashioned me thought that the dancers squirming and stretching their lithe bodies in yoga-like asanas were a little too scantily-dressed or flailing too provocatively. These dancers portrayed the hungry ghosts in the quasi-musical on Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. Overcoming this knee-jerk disapproval, I found myself questioning if I was too obsessed with physical forms by letting my eyes lead me. I could barely sustain my yoga routine involving only the most basic postures yet they made it look so easy! I began to appreciate the hard work and long hours that they must have gone through in order to train their bodies to contort readily into such unnatural positions. It made me realise that I need sustained motivation and effort in my own practice, whether yogic or Buddhist.

Ironically, the most memorable parts were the imperfect moments when things did not go as planned. The most touching moment for me happened when the sound system developed a glitch and Imee had to project her melodious voice throughout the huge concert hall. In that very short time when the AV system shut down, Imee's soft but pithy voice streamed across like a faint echo to the very back where I was seated and struck a quivering chord in my heart. Despite the misgivings I had

earlier about a Buddhist concert being oxymoronic, I could not deny that her sincerity was beyond reproach. Towards the end, when she admitted to being "too emotional" and getting the *Pali* words mixed up in the performance, that was when all the techno glitz and glossy marketing faded away and she came across as human, earnest and authentic in her wish to spread the Dharma through her music and performing arts. It was a timely call to cherish the underlying sincere intentions and see beyond the gaffes.

Not all blunders should be so easily forgiven, however. Alas, I regret that my experience was initially marred by latecomers who blocked my view from the visual displays on the large screen. Subsequently, my view was interrupted repeatedly by the ushers who had to walk to and fro asking the audience to refrain from taking photos or videos during the performance. I even overheard an usher requesting a gentleman to put his legs down. The performers were not the only ones under scrutiny that night – we the audience could get our

acts together too. Thankfully, I was able to revel in the concert even with my eyes closed and I found that doing so actually enhanced my sensitivity to the music and melodious chanting as I concentrated on listening to the chanting. **It struck me that a concert could well be the ultimate lesson in impermanence. All the sensory stimuli, whether of images, sounds, feelings or other sensations, are ethereal. They arise, fade away and are gone forever. Notwithstanding this, they all have their time and place in the larger scheme of things.**

The finale saw Venerable Kwang Sheng invited onstage during the curtain call to lead the dedication prayer which we were encouraged to join in. Imee had alluded to audience participation at one point during the concert and it was a pity that this was not forthcoming until the end. It would have personalised the whole experience for us and made the night more meaningful for all.

I am thankful that I stayed open to what turned out to be a truly contemplative experience, facilitated by the wholesome and uplifting vibrations from the enriching music and engaging performances both on and off the stage. There is a belief that simply being in the vicinity of the resonance created from Buddhist chanting itself is meritorious. I have also learned in a sound therapy course that the acoustic frequencies by which music is created offer one of the most efficacious means to effect healing in the human

aura. If these beliefs are true, then a Buddhist concert must surely be a most auspicious and nourishing way to spend a fulfilling evening, instead of being mindlessly deluged by other forms of vacuous entertainment.

It is heartening to witness a burgeoning Buddhist performing arts sector in the making. Our troubled world is besieged with clashing music choked full of swear words and hate language. Even the news agencies spew out an



endless stream of war cries between opposing sides that hardly aid peace. I salute Imee and her troupe for doing the "unthinkable" as proscribed by a narrow reading of the precepts. They are stepping up to the challenge of spreading the Dharma through a skilful means that both young and old can readily relate to. By doing so, they are offering an alternative way to promoting harmony and inner peace, in contrast to the usual mind-numbing amusement detrimental to conscious living which we are bombarded with every day. The Chinese title of this World Tour suggests a cleansing of the world, which aptly sums up what may be described as an aural detox experience. ☺

text : Oh Puay Fong



The Foundation Matters

It's been eight years since I first went to Brahma Vihari in Maymyo. Time flies!

I am fortunate to have the guidance of a teacher, who has been working tirelessly to propagate the Dharma all over the world. Her students everywhere appreciate her efforts and guidance.

Back at the centre, she is not just teacher, but also manager, mother, construction supervisor, kitchen overseer – juggling all the multiple roles of the centre. We witness how our teacher takes on her duties to the best of her abilities.

This is the way she strives to train us as well. We need to know how the kitchen works, the plumbing, electricity, gardening, marketing... it's like we have to master almost all the skills and knowledge related to the maintenance of the monastery and so on.

Sometimes, we do not understand why we have to learn all these. Didn't we come with the intention of attaining the highest, supramundane goal of nirvana? A pure intention which transcends all secular, worldly matters and concerns, such as cooking, cleaning or a leaking roof. Or so we thought!

Over and over again, she emphasised that building a strong foundation is very important for a person. We need to be a part of the community we are in by doing our various duties. As long as we stay here, we need to look out for the welfare of the centre and our fellow residents. She does not allow anyone to stay out of group projects unless we are sick or have other duties. Everyone is an equal part of the community. She trains us to be like a big family. We work together and we are to help one another.

After many years of fighting the aversion and rejection I had internally about having to 'embrace' these so-called worldly activities, I began to understand the rationale of her training.

She often used this Burmese phrase 'auq chyay luq deh' (literally, it means "someone whose feet are not touching the ground") to describe a person with head in the sky who does not have the foundation set down right, and who is not down-to-earth. She would often chide us for being proud or arrogant, thinking that we already know all there is to know and not wanting to learn more.

Through another senior, I heard anecdotes of how my teacher worked tirelessly in the beginning years under her Master. Her days began early at 3am when they prepared breakfast for the monastics and other residents of the centre. Sometimes they worked continuously until lunch with little time to rest. At lunch time, they were sometimes so exhausted that they had no appetite at all.

During the early days, there was only one wooden building in the centre. When the forest centre started expanding, all the monks and nuns (only a small group at that time) had to help with the construction to save costs. They carried big rocks and bricks, as well as washed and filtered sand. Though the work was tough they were happy, staying together like a big family.

The nuns saved little snacks or coffee packets donated by others to serve all the rest at tea-break. In those early days, they ate whatever food obtained by their Master from his alms rounds in the village. Often, it was the same breakfast everyday - rice, boiled beans and banana - but they were happy, grateful and contented.

Those were the hardships that our teacher went through and she must be so concerned that we are having such a good life that we would not understand the law that 'no success comes without blood and toil'.

For me, it is as if I am tossing about in my own samsara on the same issues over and over again. Dissatisfied with my mundane life and working life, I came to the monastery. Yet the more I tried to shake off duties and responsibilities, the more they came to me. Then it dawned upon me that my 'rejection' is based on a wrong understanding. A wrong understanding that liberation comes from avoidance, from merely quitting the external conditions.

Liberation actually comes from our own mind. I remember this Buddhist cartoon I watched many years ago. In the cartoon, a rich man decided to build a three-storey building. The contractor started working on the project. One day, the rich man came to survey the construction and was displeased. He asked his contractor, "Why are you spending so much time on the first storey? I just want the building to be three-storeys high. Quickly go on and build the third storey!" The contractor replied in frustration, "How can you have the third storey without the lower storeys?"

"Why not?" The rich man retorted. Exasperated, the contractor followed the rich man's instructions and erected four long pillars in place of the foundation of the first and second storeys. At the height of the third storey, he made a concrete platform. In the cartoon, the third floor was accessible only by a rope ladder. When it was completed, the rich man climbed up his three-storey house gleefully. Like all rich men, he was fat. Exhausted by the climb up, he sat down hard on the concrete floor of the third storey. Plomp! Down he went through the broken concrete in a cloud of dust! The moral of the story is without a good foundation on the lower floors, the upper levels cannot stand firm.

This is the same for our character development, and our spiritual cultivation.

Practice starts where we are.

We need to eat everyday, so we need to learn how to cook and prepare our meals. We need to use water to shower and wash clothes and water the lawn everyday, so we need to know how to operate the water pump. And so on...

In order not to become 'auq chyay luq' (i.e to have one's head in the clouds), we need to be humble and patient with our life tasks. Life may become more convenient when we hand over the chores to others, but then we have to deal with different kinds of troubles: of managing people who help us, of making them happy to do so, or of finding enough financial resources to sustain these people who do our chores.

"Life isn't easy. Practising the Dharma isn't easy." Our teacher reminds us over and over again.

The practice is not easy. But that is because of our mind.

<

We think we are better than others; we think we are worthy of more superior practices or activities so we look down on daily, mundane activities, and on physical work and manual labour.

The practice of the Dharma is also about letting go of such high and mighty perceptions of ourselves. We are not superior to others, neither are we inferior. We are just who we are at this stage in our samsaric existence.

We all have duties, responsibilities and challenges in our current existence. **Practice is about being practical and humble about these duties, striving to go about them as best as we can with wholesome minds, with thoughts of loving-kindness towards our fellow samsaric companions, and knowing that there is a possibility of a higher spiritual evolvment so whatever occurring now is transient and cannot be clung onto.**

When our basic duties in life, in the community and society are not fulfilled, they come back to haunt us every so often.

I realised that peace of mind is linked very much to the ability to be humble, to have a mind of loving-kindness, generating the vibrations of harmlessness and reassurance towards everyone around us. Such a mind doesn't inflate or belittle oneself. We just be where we are at the present moment and accept ourselves for who we are.

Such a practical, down-to-earth and stable mind is necessary for further development towards stillness and calmness of mind which eventually leads to deeper insight of our life and mind.

We need to exert consistent effort at regulating our own vibes or states of minds which have a tendency to 'rock the boat' in order to maintain stability of our mind, or what I call our internal peace index.

Once that is achieved, the muddy water of our mind becomes clear, and our internal mindfulness tracker becomes so sharp and accurate that the universe and its workings can be clearly understood depending on how sharp the mind becomes.

Then it might become clear that we had been rocking an old, leaking boat in a little mud pond thinking that we would be able to go around the world in eighty hours in it. We might become like an old wizened man sitting on a rocking chair, tea cup in one hand, on a high cliff peering down at the young men toiling hard at the foot of the mountain, striving to remove enough soil to move the mountain completely out of their path.

I look forward to that...

It seems that my teacher had been trying so hard to tell me that I was weaving empty clouds in the wide, open sky and trying to tie them to the wind.

My feet seems to feel the ground more firmly now. Yes, I need more grounding!

I am taking off my heavy-duty trekking boots with protection thick padding, anti-bacterial soles etc for a barefooted walk the rest of the way... ☺



text : Ng Pei Fuen



Almond Sesame cookies 芝麻杏仁饼



Of the various Chinese New Year goodies, almond cookies are undoubtedly a favourite of many people. However, almond cookies bought off the shelf are often too sweet, relying on almond extract rather than real almonds to bring out the rich flavour of almond. Often, shortening is also used to achieve a melt-in-the-mouth texture. Furthermore, almond cookies available in the market may not be vegan. Why not make your own almond cookies this Chinese New Year? This version throws in sesame seeds for a richer flavour, creating a slightly sweet and salty taste that is crispy on the outside but soft on the inside. You just can't resist popping in a few of these morsels at one go.



杏仁饼是许多人喜爱的佳节食品，但外面售卖的很多含高糖份，杏仁成分不高，多使用香精带出杏仁味，另外也有很多加入起酥油以达到入口即化的口感。当然，也有一些杏仁饼并非纯素。新年佳节何不自己动手制作健康美味的杏仁饼？这款加入芝麻的杏仁饼，杏仁香夹着芝麻香，更富层次，咸香微甜，入口即碎，令人忍不住非得一口气吃下好几颗。



Ingredients :

- Plain flour 180g
- Almond 100g
- Sesame seed 20g
- Granulated sugar *60g
- Grapeseed oil 80g
- Baking powder ½ teaspoon
- Salt ½ teaspoon
- Sliced almond 50 – 60 pieces

Method :

- 1 Roast almond in oven at 150°C for approximately 20 minutes. Grind almond into fine meal. (Alternatively, use almond flour).
- 2 Add plain flour, almond flour, sesame seeds, sugar, baking powder and salt into mixing bowl. In a circular motion as if washing rice, mix the ingredients together.
- 3 Add grapeseed oil and mix together in a circular motion as if washing rice, until the oil is absorbed and a dough is formed.
- 4 Using a teaspoon, scoop out some dough, shape into a ball. Add a slice of almond on each cookie ball and slightly press down so as to achieve an evenly baked cookie.
- 5 Bake in a preheated oven at 170°C for about 12 minutes until the cookies are lightly browned. Remove from oven to cool. Enjoy your cookies.

* Do note that the processing of white sugar commonly involves bone char filter and is hence not vegan. For the vegan-conscious, you can use organic cane sugar or other brands that do not use bone char filter.

材料 :

- 中筋面粉 180 克
- 杏仁 100 克
- 芝麻 20 克
- 细砂糖 *60 克
- 葡萄籽油 80 克
- 泡打粉 (发粉) ½ 小匙
- 盐 ½ 小匙
- 杏仁片 50-60 片

做法 :

- 1 杏仁放入烤箱，以150°C干烘约20分钟。用研磨机打成粉末状（或直接用杏仁粉也可以）。
- 2 在搅拌盆中放入面粉、杏仁粉、芝麻、糖、泡打粉与盐。如洗米般用手绕大圈混拌所有材料。
- 3 加入葡萄籽油，如洗米般用手绕圈混拌，让油渗入形成面团。
- 4 用茶匙勾起一块面团，推出面团揉成球状。每颗面团加上一片杏仁片，同时将面团稍微压扁，以确保中间容易烤透。
- 5 放入170°C预热的烤箱中烤约12分钟，直到呈现淡淡烤色，取出冷却后即可享用。

* 一般白糖制作过程使用动物骨炭过滤，因此并非纯素，据了解SIS糖不使用骨炭过滤，另外纯素者也可使用有机蔗糖。

The Thoughtful Mother

retold by: **Esther Thien**
illustration by: **Robert Yeo**

Once, there lived a woman who sold beansprouts in the market for a living. She and her young son were quite poor, and they could hardly make ends meet.

The burdens of poverty often harden a person's heart but throughout it all, the woman remained kind and upright. Through her conduct and the stories she shared, her son too exhibited those qualities.

Her only wish was to see her son excel in life and to live without hardship or poverty. Hence she worked really hard, rain or shine, to put her son through college.

As she desired, upon graduation, her son landed a cushy job, and married a nice lady who too came from a poor family but had a pure and good heart. The son bought a house and the three of them lived together happily.

Although the son was now successful and married, the mother still sold beansprouts at the market as she did not want to be a burden to the young couple.

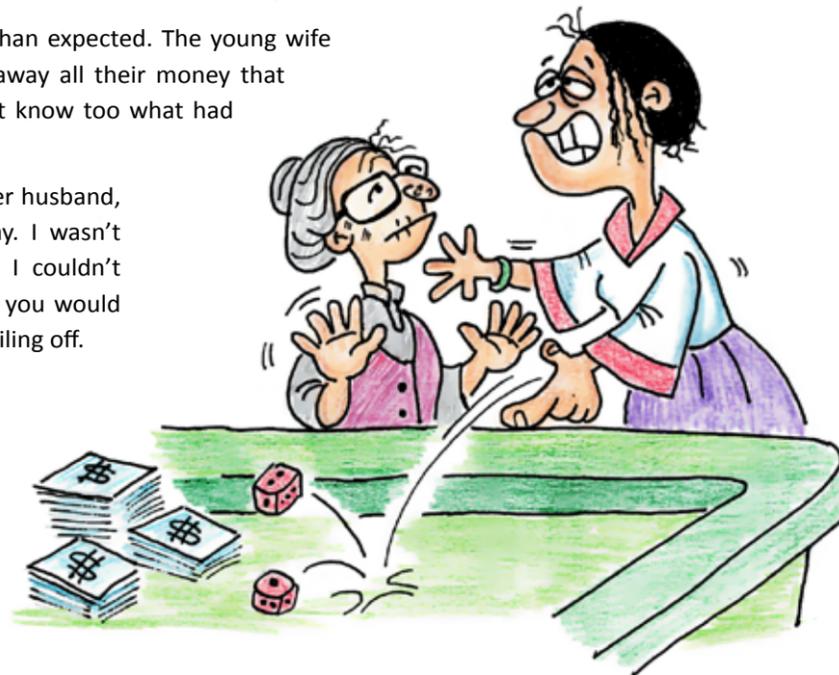
Six months later, her son was sent to work in the Middle East for two years on a project, leaving his wife alone in Korea.

Without her husband around, the young homemaker started playing card games to while the time away. Before long, she was spending most of her husband's pay and bonuses on her gambling habit.

The mother tried all means to stop her daughter-in-law's gambling ways. She cajoled and berated but the young woman was so addicted to gambling that she couldn't stop no matter what her mother-in-law did. Eventually, the elder woman had no choice but to move out.

A year later, the son returned earlier than expected. The young wife panicked. Not only had she gambled away all their money that she was supposed to save, she did not know too what had become of her mother-in-law.

Desperate, the young woman lied to her husband, "Your mother just moved out one day. I wasn't home, and I looked everywhere, but I couldn't find her. I didn't inform you as I know you would definitely worry," she said, her voice trailing off.



Her husband stormed out and went to the market to look for his mother's old friends. He finally found his mother. When he brought her home, the daughter-in-law fell to her knees and begged for her husband's forgiveness.

Unexpectedly, the mother turned to her son and said that his wife had not done anything wrong. She left because she did not like being cooped up and wanted to be near her friends at the market.

Later, when her son was not looking, she gave a bank book to her daughter-in-law with the young woman's name on it. A sizeable figure was displayed on the book, enough that the son wouldn't suspect his wife of any wrongdoing.



You see, when the mother left the house, she already had a plan. She rented the cheapest room available and did all kinds of odd jobs she could find, besides selling beansprouts in the market. The mother lived frugally like this for a year, saving every single cent she could, because she did not want to see her son's family torn apart.

This episode changed the young woman's life. When the young wife realised the toils and tribulations her mother-in-law must have endured to save this sum of money, she hugged her mother-in-law, with uncontrollable tears streaming down her face, awed by the unbelievable kindness and love of the older woman. ☺

What do you think would have happened if the mother gave in to frustration and resentment? Would things have turned out this well?

If you dislike someone and harbour negative and harsh thoughts towards that person, you are the one who will suffer the most ultimately. Therefore, maintain a kind and gentle frame of mind at all times, even when you are confronted with unfavourable circumstances.

No matter how angry or betrayed you feel, do your best to avoid speaking or acting rashly. Think about the situation from the other person's perspective, and deeply reflect upon your own behaviour and assumptions.

This is the wisdom that can change the world. If you can live with such wisdom, how can your family and society not be happy and peaceful?

A single, tiny thought can change the world. Everything begins with the thoughts one gives rise to. So how can there be anyone whose thoughts do not matter?

- Zen Master Daehaeng



The Merits of Producing Buddhist Teachings and Buddha Images

- 1 One's light karmic misgivings will dissolve, while heavy ones lighten.
- 2 One will be protected by devas, and be unharmed by natural and man-made disasters.
- 3 One will always be free from the suffering of hatred and vengeance.
- 4 One will be unharmed by yakas, evil spirits and wild beasts.
- 5 One's mind will be at peace, free from harm and nightmares.
- 6 One's complexion will be radiant.
- 7 One will be full of auspicious energy.
- 8 One who practises the Dharma wholeheartedly will have adequate living necessities.
- 9 One's family will be harmonious and be blessed with fortune and wisdom.
- 10 One who practises what one preaches will be respected and loved by all.
- 11 One who is dull-minded will gain wisdom.
- 12 One who is ill will gain health.
- 13 One who is poor will gain wealth.
- 14 One will be free of being reborn in the negative realms.
- 15 One will be able to help others grow in wisdom and gain great merits in doing so.
- 16 One will always be able to learn the Dharma, till one's wisdom and spiritual penetrations are fully grown and one becomes a Buddha.

Dear Reader, "The Gift of the Dharma Exceeds All Other Gifts."

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Issue 34 / 2016

Counselling & Social Services
心理辅导与社会服务

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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 情绪低落沮丧	Sad
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 生活压力繁重	Stressed
<input type="checkbox"/> 情感上碰到状况	Stuck in a relationship rut
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Want Your story to be heard too?

Are you touched by the stories and interviews featured in this magazine?

Perhaps you too have a story to tell, a story of how the Buddha and His Teachings so inspired you to walk the Buddhist path, or maybe a simple account of the little treasures and blessings in life? Or perhaps you are a budding poet who would like to share a prose and a verse or two about how the Dharma changed your life forever?

Whatever your story or poem may be, we welcome you to write in to us. Share your inspiring tale of faith and awakening with the rest of the world.

Send your entries to awaken@kmspks.org or:

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Please include your full name, address and contact details. We reserve the right to edit the stories and letters for space and grammar considerations.

WHAT'S NEW
 Text: Esther Thien



Auspicious Miniature Lanterns for the New Year

Celebrate the Year of the Monkey with these adorable miniature lanterns. Hang them all around the house singly or in clusters to enhance the festive mood.

These quaint lanterns are made from bamboo and a special type of Japanese paper. When lighted, these lanterns throw interesting shadows around due to their bamboo frames.

You can choose from lanterns that showcase auspicious calligraphic verses or exquisite floral motifs. Each lantern also features an interesting Chinese knot and costs \$18.

To find out more, please call Awareness Place stores at 6337 7582 or 6452 1732.



Buddhist Meditation Trainer

Spacebug
Free

Create some space for your mind to relax by meditating every day for four minutes with this app. Simple to use even for people who has never meditated before. It features 10 levels with deeper quotes to meditate on as you progress. The app also gently reminds you to meditate every few days with a prompt. Available on Google Play.



Scan to download app

One good thing about having a smartphone or tablet is that it can be used to connect you to the wisdom of the Dharma 24/7. text: Esther Thien

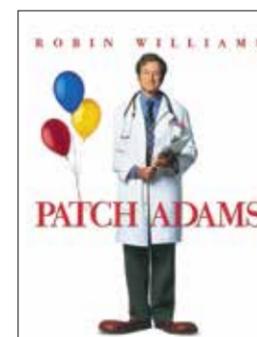
Dharma Apps

SEEN

Altruism leads to happiness text: Susan Griffith-Jones

Patch Adams

Directed by : Tom Shadyac
Starring : Robin Williams, Monica Potter, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Daniel London, Bob Gunton



Scan to watch movie

Hunter Adams (played by Robin Williams) is a middle-aged man, who has lost his path in life. Having become suicidal, he commits himself to a mental institution, where he finds that through helping the other patients, he forgets about his own problems; that this altruistic behaviour creates “an incredible feeling”. Whilst learning from one of the inmates to look beyond the problem in order to find the solution, he earns himself the nickname ‘Patch’, a name that will become his mission in life: to help people to patch themselves up.

Deciding that he himself wants to become a doctor so that he can help people in a genuinely compassionate way, he enrolls in a medical school and becomes one of the top students in the class, albeit the oldest. Connecting with each and every patient individually in the hospital attached to the medical college, he distracts them with his clown-like behaviour prompting their laughter and thus, boosting their immune systems and health. Each ward becomes a place of laughter, games and joy, resulting in the patients needing less pain medication and not grumbling as much.

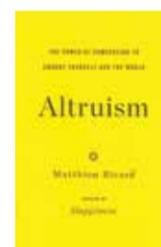
Patch says “It’s because they don’t concentrate on the pain, they don’t feel it for one brief moment.” Through his theory of spontaneously changing the programmed response of the patients by transforming the conditions, by altering the parameters and getting new emotional responses from them, he reaches into their hearts and touches them where other doctors do not even realise they can go.

Yet despite his excellent academic performance, he manages to earn the disrespect of most of his peers and teachers in college, as his ideas and ways are too unconventional. “You don’t fit in, you make everyone uncomfortable,” his professor tells him. He argues that as a doctor interacting with people at their most vulnerable, he is treating the patient as well as the disease, through hope and counsel.

After several attempts to remove him from the establishment as his methods are seemingly against the “centuries of experience” that doctors should uphold, he is actually able to shed light on their encrusted ways and illuminate to the next generation of doctors what their real task at hand is.

Throughout this whole experience, he does find a small group of students who realises that he has a very special way with people through a direct transference of love. By treating them as individuals, and not just as diagnosed diseases, whether they live or die as a result of their illness, their lives would still have been improved.

Along with the assistance of these few friends, his dream of setting up a medical institution where humour is used to heal pain and suffering, where joy is a way of life and love is the ultimate goal, begins to manifest. Free and accessible to anyone, people would have fun-filled healthcare, where the quality of the patient’s lives are improved, and the aim not just to delay death.



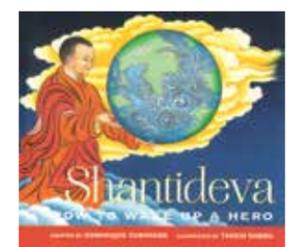
Altruism
By Matthew Ricard
\$43.90



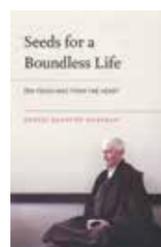
Medicine and compassion
By Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche & David R. Shlim, MD
\$24.90

Ever asked yourself, “What is a good life?” If your answer to that question is to become a better person by transforming your way of being and thinking, read *Altruism*. Altruistic love and compassion is the heart of the spiritual path. We must understand that our own well-being cannot rest on indifference to the happiness of others or on a refusal to care about the suffering around us. Yet, altruism does not mean one simply tolerates the misdeeds of others.

Just as *Altruism* gives detailed instructions on how one can cultivate altruistic love, meditation instructions are also given in *Medicine and Compassion*. As the author, Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche says aptly, “When we do it right, all good qualities start to manifest from our mind, and all negative traits begin to grow less and less.” Both books are available at Awareness Place stores.



Shantideva
Adapted By Dominique Townsend
\$25.50



Seeds for a Boundless Life
By Zenkei Blanche Hartman
\$26.00

Shantideva is a beautifully illustrated book that is easy-to-read. It retells the interesting accounts of the bodhisattva in a lively manner for children and families. This is a good book to read to kids and introduce to them the qualities of *bodhicitta*, altruism and compassion.

Seeds for a Boundless Life is another reader-friendly book in which *Zenkei’s* love and wisdom shine through. She gives wise counsel like a kind-hearted grandma. This book will guide you, warm your heart and deepen your practice. Both books are available at Awareness Place stores.

READ

Be Kinder and Wiser in 2016 text: Esther Thien

The Ocean-wide Flower Garland Assembly
\$22



The Amitabha Sutra The Stories of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
By Imee Ooi
\$15 each



Asian Jewel
By Dechen Shak-Dagsay
\$30



Zambhala
\$18.90



Kick-start 2016 and the Year of the Monkey on a good note by listening to the King of Aspiration by Bodhisattva Samantabhadra in *The Ocean-wide Flower Garland Assembly*. The track is composed and sung by Kuo Heng Chi in Mandarin. If you were mesmerised by the ethereal voice of Imee Ooi at her recent Singapore concert, do get her two latest Mandarin CDs, *The Amitabha Sutra and The Stories of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas*.

Or if you prefer an album of musical prayers that comes with English explanation, listen to the lyrical *Asian Jewel* containing 10 mantra tracks. The album also includes a DVD of the vocalist practising *Taiji Quan*. Finally, boost your auspicious start to the New Year with *Zambhala*, a collection of robust yet soulful Tibetan chants. All CDs are available at Awareness Place stores.



Rebirthing: Radical Transformation Through Breath
\$39.80 each

If you are yearning for change, instead of just making New Year resolutions, why not try out *Rebirthing*? This 2-CD Mandarin album with English introduction and commentary is a precious gift that will make this world a better place if everyone practises entering life through conscious breathing and intuit the pure consciousness that underlies everyone and everything. The album is available at all Awareness Place stores.

HEARD

text: Esther Thien

Kick-start 2016 Auspiciously with Sutras, Mantras and Conscious Breathing

2016

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Calendar of Events

DHARMA

CEREMONY | PRAYERS

Offering to Heavenly Realms

1 Jan | Fri | 6am
Venue : Hall of Great Compassion
Registration : Front Office
Enquiry : 6849 5333 | 6849 5300

Alms & Sangha's Offering

1 Jan | Fri | 8am (Alms Offering)
11 am (Sangha's Offering)
Venue : KMSPKS
Registration : Front Office
Enquiry : 6849 5333

Chinese New Year Wish-fulfilling Lanterns

Light a lantern and usher in the Year of the Monkey filled with blessings for you and your family!
7 – 22 Feb
Venue : KMSPKS
Offering : \$50 per lantern
Registration : Front Office
Enquiry : 6849 5333

Chinese New Year Prayers

8 Feb, Mon | 16 Feb, Tue | 21 Feb, Sun | 22 Feb, Mon
Venue : KMSPKS
Registration : Front Office
Enquiry : 6849 5333 | 6849 5300



Threshold Refuge & 5 Precepts Ceremony

Through taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, one enters the Buddhist path, whilst undertaking the precepts (basic guidelines of moral conduct) helps one to develop mindfulness.
13 Mar | Sun | 12.30pm – 2.30pm
Venue : VHCMH | Level 4 | Hall of No Form
Enquiry : 6849 5300 | sem@kmspk.org

Qing Ming Prayer

4 Apr | Mon
Venue : KMSPKS
Registration : Front Office
(From 2 Feb onwards till fully registered)
Enquiry : 6849 5333

TALKS | WORKSHOPS | COURSES

Heart Sutra Workshop

Heart Sutra, at just 260 Chinese characters, is one of the shortest and most commonly recited sutras. Join this workshop to understand more about this sutra.
3 Jan – 20 Mar | Sun | 9am – 11am
Venue : VHCMH | Level 1 | Classroom
Fee : \$40 per person
Enquiry : 6849 5300 | sem@kmspk.org

English Buddhism Course Year 1 (Module 1)

Taught by Venerable
An introduction to Buddhism: learn more about the life of the Buddha and Buddhist Observances.
2 Mar – 4 May | Wed | 7.30pm – 9pm
Venue : VHCMH | Level 1 | Classroom

English Buddhism Course Year 2 (Module 1)

Taught by Venerable
Comprehend Buddhist principles such as rebirth, six realms of existence, Karma, concept of "I" and the three marks of existence.
29 Feb – 25 Apr | Mon | 7.30pm – 9pm
Venue : VHCMH | Level 1 | Classroom

Sutra Study - The Commentary of the Mahayana Door of Wisdom on the Hundred Phenomena |

Taught by Venerable
7 Jan – 1 Sep | Thu | 7.30pm – 9pm
Venue : VHCMH | Level 1 | Classroom
Enquiry : 6849 5300 | sem@kmspk.org

Threshold Refuge 5 Precepts Preparatory Course

Understand the meaning of taking refuge and precepts.
13 Mar | Sun | 9.30am – 11am
Venue : VHCMH | Level 1 | Classroom
Enquiry : 6849 5300 | sem@kmspk.org

English Dharma Talk | By Yick Keng Hang

The History of the Buddha
17 Mar | Thu | 7.30pm – 9pm
Venue : APWBC
Fee : Free (Registration is required)
Enquiry : 6336 5067 | sem@kmspk.org

KMSPKS Guided Tour

Join us on a guided tour around KMSPKS and get to know more about Buddhism, its history and arts!
28 Feb, 27 Mar, 24 Apr (Sun) | 10am – 12pm
Meeting place : VHCMH | Level 1
Fee : Free (Registration is required)
Registration : 6849 5300 | guidedtour@kmspk.org

MEDITATION | RETREAT

Self-Meditation @ Lunch

Join our meditation session during lunch and relax your mind and body. Registration is required.
6 Jan – 27 Apr | Wed | 12.30pm – 1.30pm
Venue : APWBC
Fee : Free
Enquiry : 6336 5067 | sem@kmspk.org

Mindfulness Breathing Meditation

Taught by Venerable
Mindfulness meditation can help you to generate self-awareness and develop inner peace. Come and experience the benefits.
8 Jan – 18 Mar | Fri | 7.30pm – 9pm
Venue : VHCMH | Level 4 | Hall of No Form
Enquiry : 6849 5300 | sem@kmspk.org

Meditation Group Practice

A weekly meditation practice open to all ages. Basic meditation knowledge is necessary. No prior registration is required.
Jan – Oct | Wed | 7.30pm – 9pm
Venue : VHCMH | Level 4 | Hall of No Form
Enquiry : 6849 5300 | sem@kmspk.org

Relaxation & Mindfulness Meditation

Join Venerable Kwang Sheng as he shares how meditation and Buddhist teachings can help us re-focus our mind, bring about a sense of peace and well-being and re-energise ourselves.
22 Feb – 28 Mar | Mon | 7.30pm – 9pm
Venue : VHCMH | Level 4 | Hall of No Form
Fee : \$20
Enquiry : 6849 5300 | sem@kmspk.org

YOUTH

DHARMA

Sunday Group Cultivation (Open to all ages)

Join us every Sunday for a short chanting, short guided meditation & a not so short discussion led by Venerable Chuan Guan. No prior registration is required.
Every Sun | 2pm – 3:30pm
Venue : VHCMH | Level 1 | Classroom 5
Enquiry : 6849 5345 | youth@kmspk.org

Lunch Gathering

Lunch gathering Sunday Group Cultivation
First Sunday of every month | 12pm – 1pm
Venue : VHCMH | Level 1 | Classroom 5
Enquiry : 6849 5345 | youth@kmspk.org

Life Liberation

A way to practise kindness and compassion towards animals by saving them from being killed for food. Once every two months | Sun | 9.30am – 12.30pm
Venue : Changi Jetty
(Gathering point at KMSPKS, VHCMH)
Enquiry : 6849 5345 | youth@kmspk.org

LIFESTYLE

Y Talk

A self-improvement and self-help initiative targeted at young adults and professionals. There are various themed topics and invited speakers will share their stories and experiences.
Every 2nd & 4th Thu of the month
| Thu | 7.30pm – 9.30pm
Venue : APWBC
Enquiry : 6849 5345 | ytalk@kmspk.org

COMMUNITY

Food Ration

Play your part for the community! Join us to deliver food to the low-income families at Thomson Ville Estate.
Every 2nd Sun of the month (except Feb)
| Sun | 8.30am – 12pm
Venue : KMSPKS
Enquiry : 6849 5359 | youth@kmspk.org



Y Tuition

A free tuition programme for Secondary 3-5 students.
Every Sun (From 10 Jan onwards) | 9am – 2pm
Venue : VHCMH | Level 1 | Classroom
Enquiry : 6849 5345 | youth@kmspk.org

LIFESTYLE

FAMILY | RELATIONSHIP

Awakening a Kind Heart Workshop | By Vina Toh
4 & 11 Jan | Mon | 7.30pm – 9.30pm
Venue : VHCMH | Level 1 | Classroom 1
Fee : \$40 per person
Enquiry : 6849 5300 | community@kmspk.org

Journey to an Intimate Relationship ~

Preparing For Marital Bliss Together | By Sean Liew
5 & 12 Mar | Sat | 10am – 12pm
Venue : VHCMH | Level 1 | Classroom 5-6
Fee : \$50 per person | \$80 per couple
Enquiry : 6849 5300 | community@kmspk.org

Emotional Freedom Workshop

A workshop to recognise our emotions, raise our emotional intelligence so that we can better take charge of our lives.
19 Feb – 1 Apr | Fri | 7pm – 10pm
Venue : APWBC
Fee : \$200 (6 sessions)
Enquiry : 6336 5067 | sem@kmspk.org