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Led by His Eminence Drubwang Konchok Norbu Rinpoche

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大成就者竹旺贡觉诺布仁波切
~ His Eminence Drubwang Konchok Norbu Rinpoche ~

24/12/2005 6.00pm — 1/1/2006 12.30am

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awaken

... to Compassion and Wisdom on the journey of life



awaken magazine

Founder

Ven Sik Kwang Sheng

Editorial Director

Ven Sik Chuan Xiang

Managing Editor

Esther Thien

Editor

Shen Shi'an

Graphic Designer

Ada Koh

Finance Manager

Ong Kah Lai

Printed by

Ad Graphic Pte Ltd
12 Loyang Lane
Singapore 508926
Tel: 6747 8320
Fax: 6743 1915

Distributed by

Kong Meng San Phor Kark See
Monastery

Publisher

Kong Meng San Phor Kark See
Monastery
Awaken Publishing and Design
88 Bright Hill Road,
Singapore 574117
Tel: 6849 5300
Fax: 6452 8332
e-mail: awaken@kmspsks.org

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MITA(P) 128/01/2005
ISBN: 981-05-2839-6



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Cover : The downward pointing hand of Guanyin Bodhisattva is the Dana Mudra, or the gesture of generosity, the giving of whatever others need. When the hand points upwards instead, it is the Abhaya Mudra, or the gesture of fearlessness, the reminder that with the Dharma, there is "no need to fear". The eye in the palm symbolises the all-seeing eye of wisdom coupled with the helping hand of compassion. The background of a thousand hands symbolises the Bodhisattva's perfect compassion and skillful means in reaching out in all directions at the same time to help the needy.

Photography: H C Heng

Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the last issue of AWAKEN for the year 2005. Putting together this issue holds special significance to me as I have just given birth to a bouncing baby girl in July. It made me realise how all little ones are really little bodhisattvas. Concealed in each and everyone of them are the precious seeds of Buddhahood. Though they may test our patience at times, they also teach us boundless and unconditional love through their wide-eyed innocence and purity.

Yet, whether they're able to develop a kind and expansive heart, or whether they can let their Buddha-nature shine through depends on how we, as parents, use the Dharma to bring them up.

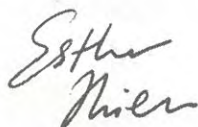
As Thich Nhat Hanh once said: "Mindful parenting is a deep spiritual practice." If we parent mindfully, instilling in them the Buddha's qualities of loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity, through our own behaviour, our kids will learn how to be happy in life.

Growing up to be kind human beings, they will be shielded from harmful, destructive emotions. Even if negative emotions do arise, they will be aware and learn to work with their own defilements. But if they learn and grow up to be unkind, resentful or greedy adults, they will never lead happy lives or achieve inner peace.

As this issue coincides with Children's Day in October and Grandparents' Day in November, the AWAKEN team would like to wish all little and senior bodhisattvas a Happy Children's/ Grandparents' Day.

May all sentient beings be well and happy. And may all progress well on the path of the Dharma!

Happy reading.



Yours in the Dharma,
Sister Esther Thien

Your Feedback Matters

We value your comments and welcome your suggestions for improvement to AWAKEN. Tell us how we can improve our magazine to better cater to your spiritual and holistic needs. What new columns you would like to see; which articles you would like to read? Send us your praises and flames. E-mail your feedback to awaken@kmspks.org or send them to:

AWAKEN, The Managing Editor
Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery
88 Bright Hill Road
Singapore 574117

Please include your full name and personal particulars

What Emptiness Really Means in Buddhism?

Q: Can you tell me what is the meaning of “emptiness” in Buddhism? – T.S.

A: “Emptiness” is one of the most often misunderstood, yet most important teachings in Buddhism - because the full realisation of this truth leads to nothing less than liberation in Enlightenment. Misunderstanding it, however, results in delusion, the opposite of Enlightenment. Thus, realising the true nature of Emptiness is crucial for all Buddhists for it is the core of the wisdom of the Buddha-dharma (the Buddha’s teachings on phenomena that leads to Nirvana, ie. True Happiness.)

Emptiness does NOT refer to physical emptiness such as open space. Nor is it physical nothingness. In Buddhism, Emptiness refers to the first and third aspects of the Three Universal Characteristics - *Anicca*, *Dukkha* and *Anatta* - which describe everything in the universe including both the mental (of mind) and material (of matter).

Emptiness combines the reality of *Anicca* (the truth of the constant changing of all mind and matter from moment to moment) and *Anatta* (the truth of the lack of fixed, lasting self-nature or substantiality in all mind and matter due to *Anicca*).

In short, Emptiness means everything or all phenomena is “empty” of any substantiality due to constant change. As taught clearly in the *Heart Sutra*, “... the Five Aggregates (composites of the universe - mind and matter) are all empty.... Form, the first aggregate, is Emptiness. Emptiness is Form...”

“Form” here refers to physical phenomena that is constantly in a state of flux. This state of flux also applies

to the other four mental aggregates of feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness. Thus, “forms” are still here, though changing all the time. In other words, forms are always “forming” or “unforming” - always transforming.

This clearly does NOT mean there is nothing; just that there is nothing substantial. When we realise this, we will function in this world without delusion but with wisdom, and with no attachment and aversion but with generosity and compassion with regard to any phenomenon. This itself is the state of Enlightenment.

An example of Emptiness at play is how clouds come and go. Clouds, which have form, are actually changing all the time (shape-shifting, state-changing) and are thus insubstantial, lacking in fixed nature. All other material and mental phenomena (eg. thoughts) when perceived clearly enough, including “you” and “me”, are like the clouds. When one realises and understands this in its totality, one will no longer be shackled by them, and attain true freedom.

- Shen Shi'an

Are you bugged by any problems in life? Perhaps you have difficulties overcoming certain life's challenges and obstacles? Or are you just purely curious about the Dharma? We welcome you to write in to us. E-mail your problems, issues and queries to awaken@kmspks.org or send your letters to:

AWAKEN, The Managing Editor
Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery
88 Bright Hill Road
Singapore 574117

By Esther Thien

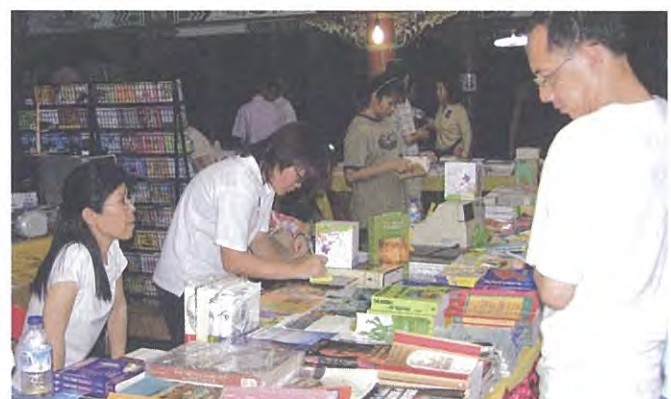
Tens of Thousands Thronged Buddhist Temple

Singapore – A chock-full of events were held at Vesak this year over at Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery, or commonly known as Bright Hill Temple by most Singaporeans. Devotees and Buddhists of all ages and background started streaming into the temple in the late afternoon of Vesak Eve, anticipating the celebrations and the meaningful spiritual activities which begin once dusk sets in. By the wee hours of Vesak Day, tens of thousands of Singaporeans had thronged the temple.

Vesak, a day that commemorates the Birth, Enlightenment and Nirvana of Shakyamuni Buddha, is a significant event in the lives of Buddhists. On that day, some chanted, some prayed, others prostrated, circumambulated, made flower and light offerings to the Buddha or meditated. All were done to purify the mind, humble the ego and lessen obstacles along the spiritual path, as one repents past wrongdoings and aspires towards spiritual improvement.

Aside from spiritual activities, visitors and devotees alike were also educated through various exhibitions on the need to protect Mother Nature and the rationale of practising compassion to fellow sentient beings by becoming vegetarian. But the centre of attraction was the splendid display of rare, ancient Buddhist artefacts from ancient Gandhara of Pakistan. Co-organised with Asian Civilisation Museum, precious Buddhist sculptures showcasing the life and teachings of the Buddha were presented for the very first time to Singaporeans. Gandhara is said to be where the very first Buddha images emerged in history, at around 1st AD.

Not forgetting the little ones, the monastery also designated an area as a family corner where games, contests and telematches were hosted to foster greater bonding between parents and their kids. To raise Buddhists' understanding of the Dharma, a series of English and Mandarin Dharma public talks given by various esteemed Venerables to were held during the week after Vesak Day. Finally, the temple's Vesak celebration concluded with a bang on June 4 with an interesting, unique Zen-like musical concert featuring the Monastery's abbot, Ven Kwang Sheng, and a fusion of assorted Western and Eastern musical instruments.



Youths Rollerbladed down Orchard in Spirit of Vesak



Singapore – Vesak 2549 is a day unlike any other for Singaporean Buddhist youths. They scored many firsts with Vesak 2549. They conceptualised, organised, and implemented almost all the activities in this celebration. Named **Love & Compassion: Towards a Better World – Vesak 2549**, it was also the first time that a Vesak celebration was held not on temple ground but at the heart of bustling

Orchard Road at Ngee Ann City Civic Plaza. During the 2-day event, Buddhist youths of various ages volunteered in different ways to bring the Buddha's teachings to the masses. Some rollerbladed down Orchard Road with placards of Buddhist quotes hanging on their shoulders. Others did group cheers and face-painting, all in the spirit of Vesak, to attract non-Buddhists to join in the fun.

Besides the usual Buddhist activities such as meditation, circumambulation of stupa, turning of prayer wheels, offering of flowers and bathing of Prince Siddhartha, the Vesak@Orchard celebration organised by the Singapore Buddhist Federation and Buddhist youths also included a funky Buddhist Youth Jam, scintillating stage performances, talks, games, a food and fun fair, and holistic fun in its line up of programmes. Local celebs like Taufik Batisah, Rui En, Zhou Chong Qing, Nick Shen and Bukoh Mary also lent star glamour in a live concert that celebrates life, hope and peace. The main highlight of this celebration is Project Infinity – a collective aspiration exercise that allows people from all ages, race and faiths to pen their well-wishes to anyone or any cause. In line with the Buddhist emphasis on universal compassion, these wish slips were then collated to form a spectacular installation art corner that radiates the spirit of harmony and respect.

Find Buddha in the Family

Seoul, South Korean – In a report by the *Digital Chosun*, respected Korean monk Pubjeong says it is not in the temples that we must look for the Buddha, but in the home and the family. “Don’t look for the Buddha or bodhisattvas in temples. We must gather our thoughts and through studying our hearts bring them inside ourselves and into our families,” he stresses. “Because of broken homes, there are many unfeeling houses that are just shells, while the warmth of families has disappeared,” continues the revered Buddhist monk.

To make his point, Rev Pubjeong gave a real-life example. “A 70-year-old grandfather moved in with his son after his wife died. One day, he went into his son and daughter-in-law’s room and by chance caught a peek of the housekeeping book. He saw the words, ‘Spending money on the country bumpkin - W20,000 (about S\$33).’ The father recognised that the bumpkin was him and left the house without delay.”

The Venerable attributed family break-up to a growing tendency to selfishness and egoism. He emphasized that we should study our own hearts if we want to understand the break-up of the family. “It’s easy to get divorced these days, but if we cannot correct our karma, even if we divorce, we cannot untie the tangled knot,” he quips. “What we have in our hearts is important, and how our lives are depends on how we resolve to live,” exclaims Rev Pubjeong. “If we think of our families and neighbours as our reflections and correct our hearts moment to moment so that we think: ‘The Buddha has come’ rather than ‘The husband I hate has come,’ we can transform our indifferent homes to ones that are full of joy and thankfulness,” he reveals.

“When that happens, instead of jotting down ‘spending money on the country bumpkin - W20,000’, we will write ‘spending money on the Buddha - W200,000’,” smiles the venerated Buddhist monk.

The Essence Of Buddhism

By Ven Thubten Chodron

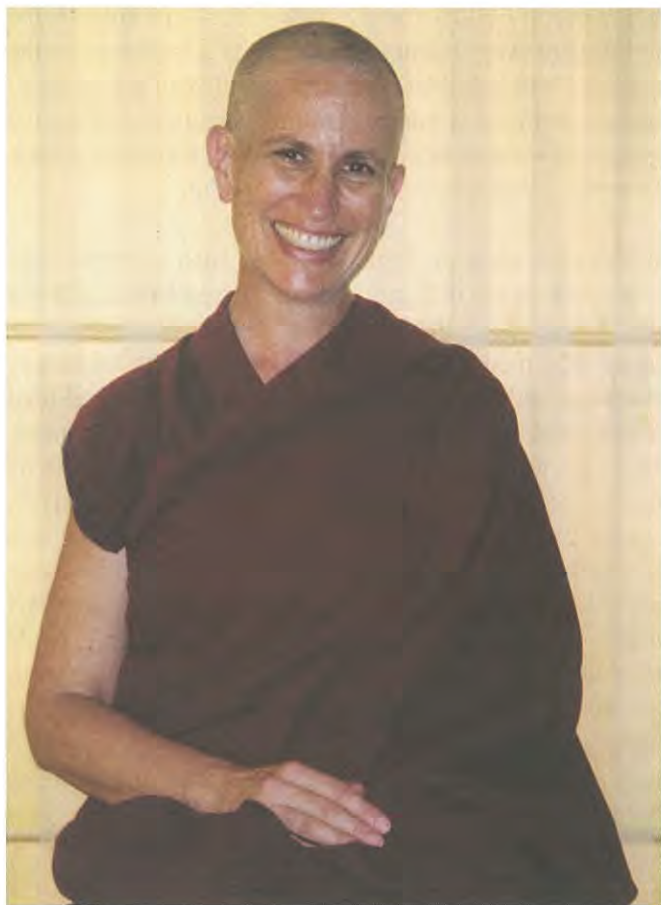


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The Essence of the Buddha's Teachings

The essence of the Buddha's teachings is to avoid harming others and to help them as much as possible. Another way of expressing this is the oft-quoted verse:

Abandon negative action;
Create perfect virtue;
Subdue your own mind.
This is the teaching of the Buddha.

By abandoning negative actions, such as hurting others, and destructive motivations, such as anger, attachment, and closed-mindedness, we stop harming ourselves and others. By creating perfect virtue, we develop beneficial attitudes, such as equanimity, love, compassion, and joy, and act constructively. By subduing our minds and understanding reality, we leave behind all false projections, thus making ourselves calm and peaceful.

We can also speak of the essence of the Buddha's teachings as they are explained in the Four Noble Truths: the truth of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and its causes, and the path to that cessation. When Buddha spoke about suffering, he meant that we have unsatisfactory experiences. Even the happiness we have does not last forever, and that situation is unsatisfactory.

The causes of our problems lie not in the external environment and those inhabiting it, but in our own mind. The disturbing attitudes and negative emotions, such as clinging attachment, anger, and ignorance are the real source of our unhappiness.

Since these are based on misconceptions about the nature of reality, they can be removed from our mindstream. We then abide in the blissful state of nirvana, which is the absence of all unsatisfactory experiences and their causes. A path exists to realise reality and increase our good qualities. The Buddha described this path, and we have the ability to actualise it.

The path is often described by the Three Higher Trainings: Ethical Discipline, Meditative Stabilisation, and Wisdom. First, we must become a good human being who functions well in society and lives harmoniously with others. The Higher Training of Ethical Discipline enables us to do this. Because our actions and speech are now calmer, we can proceed to tame the mind by developing single-pointed concentration or the Higher Training of Meditative Stabilisation. This leads us to cut the root of suffering, the ignorance grasping at inherent existence, and for this we develop the Higher Training in Wisdom, so that we can perceive reality as it is.

The Three Higher Trainings can be subdivided into the Noble Eightfold Path. Ethical Discipline includes:

- 1) right speech: truth, kind, and appropriate speech;
- 2) right activity: actions which do not harm others; and
- 3) right livelihood: obtaining our subsistence—food, clothing, and so forth—by non-harmful and honest means.

The Higher Training of Meditative Stabilisation includes:

- 4) right effort: effort to counteract the disturbing attitudes and negative emotions by meditating on the path;
- 5) right mindfulness: counteracting laxity and excitement in our meditation; and
- 6) right samadhi: the mind that can remain fixed, one-pointedly, upon virtuous objects.

The Higher Training of Wisdom includes:

- 7) right view: the wisdom realising emptiness, and
- 8) right thought: the mind that can explain the path clearly to others and is motivated by the wish for them to be free from suffering.

The essence of the Buddhist path is also contained in the three principles of the path:

- 1) the determination to be free,
- 2) the altruistic intention (bodhicitta), and
- 3) the wisdom realising reality.

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

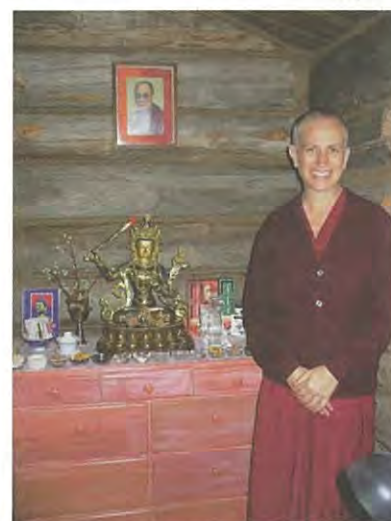
The Goal of the Buddhist Path

The Buddhist path leads us to discover a state of lasting happiness for both ourselves and others by freeing ourselves from cyclic existence, that is the cycle of constantly recurring problems that we experience at present.

Under the influence of ignorance, disturbing attitudes, and contaminated actions (karma), we are constantly subjected to the endless cycle of birth and death, 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 our 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 are not yet Buddhas, are called “sentient beings.”

The root cause of cyclic existence is ignorance: we do not understand who we are, how we exist or how other phenomena exist. Unaware of our own ignorance, we project fantasized ways of existing onto ourselves and others, thinking that everyone and everything has some inherent nature and exists independently, in and of itself.



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8 | Feature

This gives rise to attachment, an attitude that exaggerates the good qualities of people and things or superimposes good qualities that are not there and then clings to those people or things, thinking they will bring us real happiness. When things do not 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—give rise to a host of other negative emotions, such as jealousy, pride, and resentment.

These attitudes then motivate us to act, speak or think. Such actions leave imprints on our mindstreams, and these imprints then influence what we will experience in the future.

We are liberated from the cycle of rebirth by generating the wisdom realising emptiness or selflessness. This wisdom is a profound realisation of the lack of a solid, independent essence in ourselves, others, and everything that exists. It eliminates all ignorance, wrong conceptions, disturbing attitudes, and negative emotions, 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.

Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

The Three Jewels are the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. A Buddha is one who has purified all the defilements of the mind—the disturbing attitudes, negative emotions and their seeds, the imprints of the actions motivated by them, and the stains of these disturbing attitudes and negative emotions. A Buddha has also developed all good qualities, such as impartial love and compassion, profound wisdom, and skilful means of guiding others.

The Dharma is the preventive measure that keeps us from problems and suffering. This includes the teachings of the Buddha and the beneficial mental states that practising the teachings lead to.

The Sangha are those beings who have direct non-conceptual understanding of reality. Sangha can also refer to the community of ordained people who practise the Buddha's teachings, but this sangha is the conventional representation of the Sangha Jewel, and is not the one we take refuge in.

Our relationship to the Three Jewels is analogous to a sick person who seeks help from a doctor, medicine and nurses. We suffer from various unsatisfactory circumstances in our lives. The Buddha is like a doctor who correctly diagnoses the cause of our problems and prescribes the appropriate medicine. The Dharma is our real refuge, the medicine that cures our problems and their causes. By helping us along the path, the Sangha is like the nurse who assists us in taking the medicine.

Taking refuge means relying wholeheartedly on the Three Jewels to inspire and guide us towards a constructive and beneficial direction in our lives. Taking refuge does not mean passively hiding under the protection of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Rather, it is an active process of moving in the direction they show and thus improving the quality of our life.

When people take refuge, they clarify to themselves what direction they are taking in life, who is guiding them, and who their companions are on the path. This eliminates the indecision and confusion arising from uncertainty about their spiritual path. Some people window-shop for spirituality: Monday they use crystals, Tuesday they do channelling, Wednesday they do Hindu meditation, Thursday they do Hatha Yoga, Friday they have holistic healing, Saturday they do Buddhist meditation, and Sunday they use Tarot cards. They learn a lot about many things, but their attachment, anger and closed-mindedness don't change much. Taking refuge is making a clear decision about what our principal path is.

It is possible to practise the Buddha's teachings and to benefit from them without taking refuge or becoming a Buddhist. The Buddha gave a wide variety of instructions, and if some of them help us live better, to solve our problems and become kinder, then we are free to practise them. There is no need to call ourselves Buddhists. The purpose of the Buddha's teachings is to benefit us, and if putting some of them into practice helps us live more peacefully with ourselves and others, that is what's most important.

Ven Thubten Chodron graduated from UCLA. She studied and practised Buddhism of the Tibetan tradition for many years in India and Nepal under the guidance of H. H. the Dalai Lama, Tsenzhab Serkong Rinpoche, Zopa Rinpoche, and other Tibetan masters. She was a resident teacher at Amitabha Buddhist Centre in Singapore for nearly two years and at Dharma Friendship Foundation in Seattle for ten years. Currently, she is establishing Sravasti Abbey, a Buddhist monastery in the USA, while she continues to travel worldwide to teach the Dharma. Her books include *Open Heart, Clear Mind*; *Buddhism for Beginners*; *Taming the Mind*; *Working with Anger*; and *How to Free Your Mind*.

Monthly Group Mani Recitation

Fees : Free
 Venue : 3rd floor, Ven Hong Choon Memorial Hall
 Date/Time : 17 Oct 05, 16 Nov 05, 15 Dec 05, 14 Jan 06,
 7.30pm – 9.30pm
 Details : Call 6849 5300, visit www.kmspks.org or
 e-mail events@kmspks.org to enquire

Weekly Vipassana Meditation Group Practice

Fees : Free
 Venue : 4th floor, Ven Hong Choon Memorial Hall
 Date/Time : Every Tuesday, 7.30pm – 9.30pm
 Details : Call 6849 5300, visit www.kmspks.org or
 e-mail events@kmspks.org to enquire

Understanding Family Patterns, "Oh Dear! My Child is Behaving Like Me!"

Fees : \$10 (individual) and \$18 (couple)
 Venue : OG Orchard Point, level 4 Activity Room
 Date/Time : 14 Oct 05 (Friday), 7.00pm – 9.00pm
 Details : Call 6849 5317 / 9127 5748 (Jane) /
 e-mail janetay@kmspks.org to register or enquire

Why is my child so unreasonable and demanding when he is stressed? Why is he hitting his younger sister? Has it got anything to do with me scolding him yesterday? Family patterns are passed down from generation to generation. This experiential workshop aims to help parents identify and see the patterns that they are bringing from their family of origin into their new family, and how to break some of the old habits that are not working. Come and see for yourself something you never realised, that you parent in the way you were parented.

Understanding Buddhist Practice Lecture Series – Ven Shi Chuan Cheng Public Talk

1) Chinese Buddhist Vegetarianism (19 Sept)
 2) The Buddhist Custom of Releasing Animals (27 Sept)
 Fees : Free
 Venue : Awareness Place (Well-Being Centre)
 Time : 7.30pm - 9.30pm
 Details : Call 6849 5300 or www.kmspks.org for more information

Yoga Fasting & Detox Retreat

Fees : To be advised
 Venue : Pulau Besar
 Date/Time : 1 - 5 Nov 05
 Details : Call 6849 5317 / 9127 5748 (Jane) /
 e-mail janetay@kmspks.org to register or enquire

Y_Cultivation

Fees : Free
 Venue : Awareness Place (Well-being Centre)
 Date/Time : Sat, 24 Sept 05, 3.30pm – 5.30pm
 Sat, 29 Oct 05, 5.00pm – 7.00pm
 Sat, 26 Nov 05, 3.30pm – 5.30pm
 Sat, 31 Dec 05, 6.00pm @ KMSPKS,
 (Pagoda of Ten Thousand Buddhas)
 Details : Call 6849 5346 / 9387 0252 (Qisen) or e-mail
wspdp@kmspks.org to enquire

Calling Beginners in Buddhism. Get all your questions and doubts on Buddhism cleared through this monthly chanting, teaching cum Q & A session with Ven Chuan Xian. Chanting helps one to concentrate and develop a peaceful state of mind.

Marriage Preparation Workshop

Fees : To be advised
 Venue : Awareness Place (Well-being Centre)
 Date/Time : 15, 22, 29 Oct 05, Time to be confirmed
 Details : Call 6849 5317 / 9127 5748 (Jane) /
 e-mail janetay@kmspks.org to register or enquire

Have Your Fill of Laughter & Fun in Parenting!

Fees : \$10 (individual) and \$18 (couple)
 Venue : TLC Student Care Centre (Ang Mo Kio)
 Blk 621, Ang Mo Kio Ave 9, #01-68
 Singapore 560621
 Date/Time : 2 Dec 05 (Friday), 7.00pm – 9.00pm
 Details : Call 6849 5317 / 9127 5748 (Jane) /
 e-mail janetay@kmspks.org to register or enquire
 How can I enjoy my kids more? How can I share more fun & laughter with my children? How can I create a learning experience for them that I myself also love? This workshop aims to share with parents creative ideas of relating to their kids to foster a sense of fun and belonging in the home environment. Play is an integral part of the kids' world and parents will learn to join their kids in their exciting world.

**Born to Bond Camp
(A family bonding inter-generation camp)**

Fees : To be advised
 Venue : To be advised
 Date/Time : 25 - 27 Nov 05, Time to be confirmed
 Details : Call 6849 5317 / 9127 5748 (Jane) /
 e-mail janetay@kmspks.org to register or enquire

1. Organic Cooking Workshop
2. Hatha Yoga
3. Zen Therapy
4. Relaxing Hand/Foot Massage
5. Morning Meditation
6. Energy Balancing Therapy
7. Playtime - Parent-Child Bonding
8. BrainGym
9. Come and See - Kids' Storytelling Session
10. Fountain of Youth Sharing

Venue : Awareness Place (Well-Being Centre)
 Details : For more information about date, time, venue and fees, please visit Awareness Place store at #01-63 Bras Basah Complex or www.awarenessplace.com from Oct 2005 onwards

Exploring Buddhism (Basic Course in English)

Fees : S\$20
 Venue : 3rd floor, Ven Hong Choon Memorial Hall
 Date/Time : 5 Jan 06 – 23 Mar 06
 7.30pm – 9.30pm (Every Thursday)

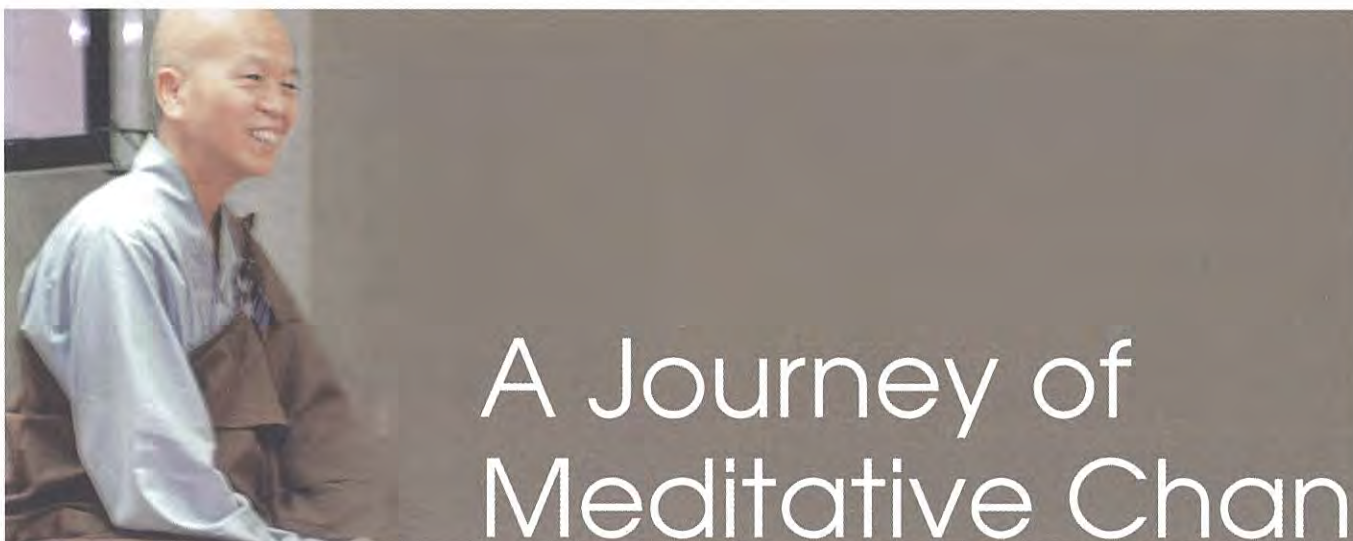
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Ven Guo Yuan, a key disciple of Chan Master Sheng Yen, speaks to Esther Thien about his work at Dharma Drum Mountain, the insights he acquired as a Buddhist practitioner and how his Master has inspired him.

For those who are familiar with Chan Meditation, or Chan Buddhism, Ven Guo Yuan may not be a stranger to you. Armed with a Canadian university degree, he was ordained under Master Sheng Yen in 1986, and was trained in New York as a monk before furthering his monastic studies in the Theravada Tradition in Thailand. In 2000, he was appointed the abbot of the Chan Meditation Centre as well as the Dharma Drum Retreat Centre in New York. Throughout these years, besides helping with the running of the meditation centre, he also assisted Master Sheng Yen in conducting intensive Chan retreats globally.

Awaken gets up close and personal with Ven Guo Yuan to find out more about the intensive Chan retreats he conducts worldwide.

Awaken: What are some of your hopes and plans for promoting Buddhism in the near future?

Ven Guo Yuan: We have a common saying among the Buddhist monks that goes “Be a monk a day, strike the bell a day.” This means that even if you are a monk for only one day, then for that day you should do what is appropriate as a monk.

Usually for myself, I don’t have plans but since Dharma Drum Mountain is a big organisation, we are normally assigned with some jobs and responsibilities, so we are actually quite busy. Besides travelling abroad to assist or conduct intensive Chan retreats, presently, my main

responsibility entails the establishment of Dharma Drum Mountain’s International Chan Retreat Centre in Taiwan. This is my work at the moment.

Awaken: Can you tell us about the insights you have learnt since you were ordained as a Sangha member, especially having assisted Master Sheng Yen?

Ven Guo Yuan: As a practitioner, one will always have insightful experiences if that person really puts his/her heart into the practice. In my case, I love to do slow prostration. I find it helps me to overcome the difficulties that I encountered in the past. I remember I was very sad when my brother suddenly passed away when he was 48. But by doing prostration mindfully, I was gradually able to overcome that sadness.

I have learnt that relaxing the mind and body really help one in daily life. These days, I just constantly remind myself to relax my mind and body so that I feel happier, and my mind opens up easier than before.

Over the years as a monk, I have also witnessed the importance of making aspirations and vows to be of benefit to sentient beings. It helps me to take on greater responsibilities, to move forward as well as keep my hopes high so that I don’t feel down or depressed when confronted with difficult situations.

Another vital thing I have learnt is the need to keep good

precepts. Keeping good behaviour and living a moral life are very important in practice. Although the spirit of Chan is very free and lively, and not limited to minute details, it is still crucial to abide by the principles of precepts. Thus, I try not to violate them.

These are some of the things that I have learnt over the years in the course of my practice. Of course in my daily life, I'm constantly aware of my shortcomings as well as my strengths. When I am conducting or assisting in the Chan retreats, I think of how to do or what to do so that the Chan practitioners can benefit. I also realise my own limitations, that there are certain things I can or cannot do.

Awaken: We understand that you have conducted and instructed numerous intensive Chan retreats all over the world. Are there any differences in and how you conduct these retreats? Do you have to guide and teach the participants, say the Mexicans from the Germans, differently?

Ven Guo Yuan: Basically, human beings are very similar. All experience emotions like love, hate and anger though their culture and ways of thinking may be a bit different. So I need to check the environment that I'm in. When I travel to a new place for retreat, I will usually make my rounds at the premises to see whether there are certain things I can make use of to make the Chan practitioners could feel more at ease as well as benefit from the environment.



In addition, I try to learn more about the practitioners - their customs, culture and country - through the activities of the day. Doing so enables me to understand them better and respond more appropriately to the Chan practitioners of different nationalities. Mexicans are more passionate while Europeans, in general, are able to flow along with the practices as we guide them. For Germans, they are quite strict with regulations so whatever regulations we set, they really put into practice, which is a good thing. To illustrate how I custom-tailor the retreat according to the situation and condition, let me cite you an example. Once in a Hua Tou retreat, Master Sheng Yen gave four Hua Tou for practitioners to use. Instead of having the whole group walk together during the walking meditation, I divided the practitioners into 4 groups with each group consisting of practitioners and a group leader

who was using the same Hua Tou. In this way, I'm able to address each group specifically for more efficient guidance.

I also try to uplift the practice of the practitioners but of course this also depends on the conditions of the practitioners and the amount of effort they put in.

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Awaken: How do you hope to raise the quality of Buddhists worldwide and their understanding of the Dharma?

Ven Guo Yuan: At Dharma Drum Mountain, we emphasize on raising the quality of the Sangha members. Thus, we have a college for the monastic community. The Sangha learn the basic teachings of Buddhism and languages that are related to it such as Mandarin, Japanese, English and Sanskrit. It is important to be trained in these languages as these are tools for studying. They also need to apply what they have learnt so that they can achieve higher quality in their practice. We also stress on receiving the correct understanding of the Buddha's teachings as well as the methods taught.

Awaken: What is the greatest inspiration you received from Master Sheng Yen?

Ven Guo Yuan: There are many ways in which Master Sheng Yen has inspired me. One of them is his selfless spirit of offering himself. Even when he's very busy, he doesn't get agitated. If ever a slight agitation arises, he would notice it right away and let it go immediately. He has that ability. His mental power is very strong and his mind is very broad and elastic, and the way he shows it is very free and natural. Another point is his ability to talk about the same subject from different perspectives. He could broach one topic in so many different ways that it makes him such a rich Dharma master. There are endless things I could learn from him.



Awaken: Despite your hectic schedule, how do you maintain your spiritual practice?

Ven Guo Yuan: Well, I take every opportunity to relax the body and mind. I try to keep my mind clear every moment, and I also try to care more about people.

Awaken: Please tell us more about Chan Meditation. What usually entails in a Chan Meditation Retreat? What can participants expect from such a retreat?

Ven Guo Yuan: We try to apply Chan meditation in our daily life by always reminding ourselves of the Buddha's mind, and being constantly mindful of attaining ultimate enlightenment with the intention of helping all sentient beings. Chan meditation can be practised in any situation - prostration, walking, eating or sitting. Different meditation

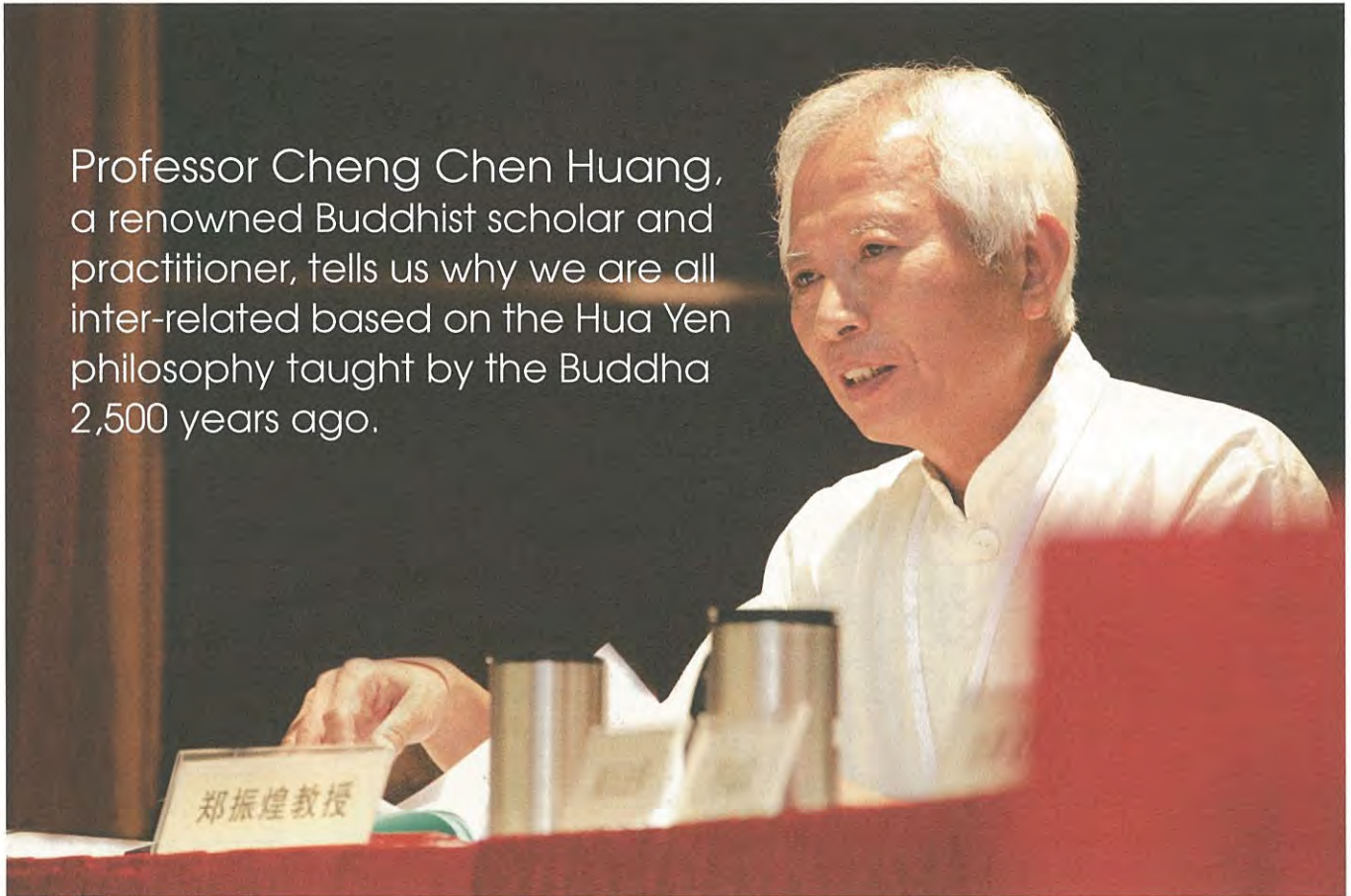
techniques can be used when one does sitting meditation. One can just sit and relax, follow the breath, use Hua Tou or recite the Buddha's name. The crux here is to keep the mind clear, to calm it in order to reach a high level of clarity and awareness. At the same time, we keep ourselves to the spirit of the training guidelines of good conduct.

In a Chan retreat, we wake up at four in the morning to exercise, followed by morning meditation, then morning service, breakfast, work practice and meditation again. We usually start the first session of meditation with a Dharma talk given by the teacher. After that, we meditate, do yoga exercises, and meditate again, followed by indoor or outdoor walking meditation before lunch. After lunch, a period is allocated where we would apply the principles of Chan during working, and another period for rest. After that, the first session of afternoon meditation begins. Afternoon schedule is

very similar to the morning session. In the late afternoon, we do our evening service and have dinner before performing personal chores. At 7 pm, we have another Dharma talk. After the talk, it would be meditation and yoga exercises again. Sometimes we do prostration practice before calling it for the night. Interview sessions are also conducted throughout the whole retreat.

Awaken: We understand that you are helping to set up the International Chan Retreat Centre in Taiwan. Can you tell us more about it?

Ven Guo Yuan: Currently, we are in the midst of constructing the building. At the same time, we're also planning advanced retreat programmes of 7 days, 10 days, 14 days and even 49 days. But the meditation or Chan hall is not just limited to those activities. The building will also be used for the Chan College, where Chan practitioners are being trained so that they can help assist and conduct Chan retreats in future. Hopefully, with the training in place, there will be more Chan Masters in the future. In addition to retreat programmes, the centre also houses a small department that does research studies, and conducts Chan practices such as the eight movements Chan exercise, the standing and sitting position Chan exercise, the Chan working practice and the Chan eating practice that are suitable for the general public.



Professor Cheng Chen Huang, a renowned Buddhist scholar and practitioner, tells us why we are all inter-related based on the Hua Yen philosophy taught by the Buddha 2,500 years ago.

Co-existence in One Global Village

Introduction

In all Buddhist philosophies, the Hua Yen philosophy of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* is the most profound. It is the very summary and epitome of Buddhist thought. It tries to illustrate the whole universe in an all-inclusive, inter-penetrating and inter-being manner. But it is indescribable. It cannot be conveyed through language or any symbols. It is a state of direct experience, as it is the realisation of Buddhahood. If we are still entrapped in the thinking style of ordinary human beings, we will not be able to understand what the essence of the Hua Yen philosophy is.

In the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, it is stated that far away, in the heavenly abode of the great god, Sakra, there is a wonderful net which had been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer had hung a single glittering jewel in each eye of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number.

There, the jewels hang, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now, arbitrarily, select one of the jewels for inspection, and look closely at it, we will discover that reflected in its polished surface are all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there occurs a wondrous infinite reflecting process.

Inter-being of all

This symbolises our world where every sentient being and phenomenon are inter-related to one another.

For instance, you can view the entire universe from a tiny grain of rice: air, water, sunshine, padi fields and the hard work of farmers and rice merchants are all within that very grain.

This is the universe envisioned and experienced by the fully enlightened ones. Only the Buddhas can understand the 'all in one and one in all' nature of co-existence and totality.

Understanding totality

Today, the world has 'shrunk'. Due to advances in information technology such as the Internet, the whole world is moving towards the direction of one global village. From the Buddhist viewpoint, this world will realise itself to be a work of Hua Yen totality, which is all-inclusive and all-embracing. You cannot separate one from the other as we are all within this totality.

That is, I'm in you and you're in me. It is because of your being that I exist here. It is not just due to the beings of present existence and phenomena that I exist here. It is also because of beings of the past that I exist here. This 'invisible' phenomena also contribute to my existence here. This is what totality means.

Totality also means there is no difference between 'big' or 'small', 'one' or 'all', 'brightness' or 'darkness'.

But we humans are discriminative. We like to distinguish one from the other. We cling to ourselves, our small egos. Due to our ignorance, we cling to the concept of *atman* (fixed 'self') or the individual entity. It is because of our ego-clinging and attachment to the concept of *atman* that we are trapped in the cyclic existence of Samsara (Saha world), experiencing rebirth again and again. We are not happy and we suffer endlessly all because of our ego-clinging out of ignorance.

Thus, understanding totality is beyond comprehension for the ordinary man. We operate in a world of explicit order where we perceive and interpret everything with a differentiating mind and every phenomenon seems separate and distinct. As we give labels to everything, there arises the experience of us liking or disliking one with respect to the other. When we encounter something or someone we like, we attach ourselves to them. But when we encounter

something or someone we dislike, hatred and aversion arise in our mind. We then 'fight' against the person or phenomenon we dislike and suffering occurs.

But through the constant practice of the Six Paramitas (Perfections of generosity, morality, patience, energy, concentration and wisdom), we understand that everything is identical in essence and share the same principles. According to the Buddha, there is actually no difference between anything – no differences exist between 'white' and 'red', 'small' and 'big'... as all phenomena share the same ground and totality that is *sunyata*, which means 'emptiness' of any fixed self-nature in existence.

The 'I' or 'self' do not exist. In fact, we do not exist independent of one another. Every being and phenomenon is inter-dependent and connected. Emptiness of self-nature is actually the principle of interdependent arising of everything.

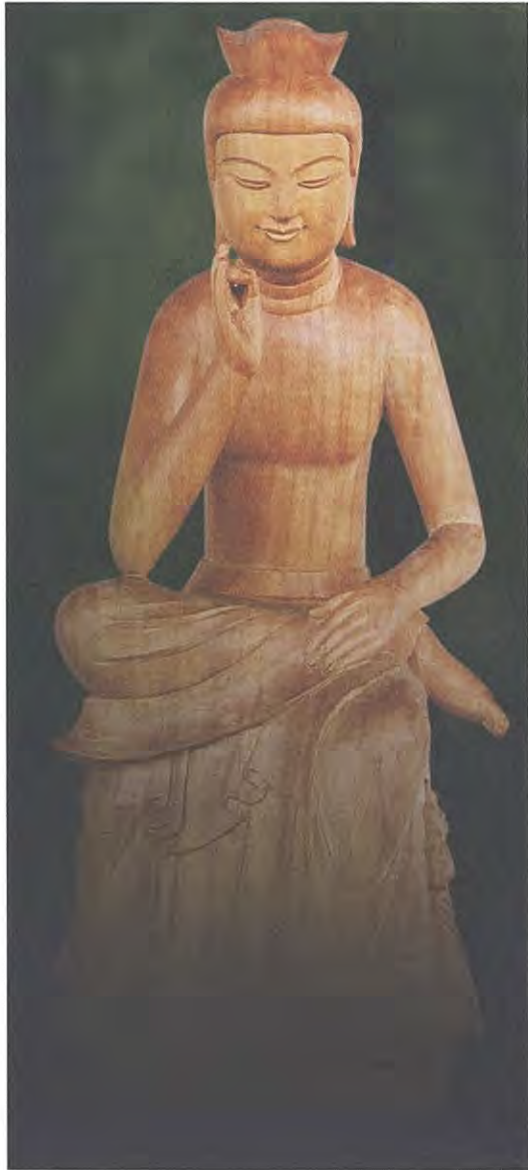
A phenomenon occurs because of the peaceful co-existence of other innumerable conditions. Although, we may divide the conditions into 'root' (conditions necessary for something to come into being, eg. a seed) and 'existential conditions' (eg. water, sunlight and soil for the seed to grow), we all share the same principle of the truth of emptiness – we are empty of any fixed entities. This is how we can co-exist peacefully here.

That is why all phenomena do not obstruct one another, for we all belong to the family of totality and inter-being. That is the fundamental truth. When everyone is able to realise this, all will be at peace. The world will exist harmoniously as everyone will be able to accept the 'differences' between one another, and embrace all with compassion and understanding.

Professor Cheng is a well-known Buddhist teacher who has conducted numerous Dharma talks, workshops and meditation retreats in Taiwan, America and Southeast Asia. Renowned for his understanding of Buddhism philosophy and practices, he has published more than 500 news articles and 20 books on Buddhism. Some of these include the Chinese translated versions of *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*; *Consciousness at Crossroads*; *Anapanasati*; *Zen in the Martial Arts*; *Beginning to See*; *Mind Like Fire Unbound*.

The True Significance of Practising Tolerance

By Ven Dr Chang Qing



Often, Buddhists are puzzled and confused by the manner of practising tolerance (忍), for they could not understand the principle and meaning of tolerance. The majority think it is simply a theory or a principle that could only be realised by sages. Due to this misconception, I will now attempt to expound on how to cultivate tolerance within us.

Generally speaking, tolerance means endurance. There are many Chinese idioms or proverbs that revere the virtue of tolerance. Some of them include: “Practising tolerance leads to gold” (百忍成金), “Inability to endure a minor setback impedes the entire plan of painstaking preparation” (小不忍，则乱大谋), “To bear abuse and heavy burden” (忍辱负重) etc.

However, lay people usually have the concept of ‘self’ towards tolerance and they rely on this concept of ‘self’ as their guideline.

For instance, the literal translation of ‘百忍成金’ is “becoming gold after hundreds of endurance”, gold being the most precious metal in the eyes of the Chinese. Metaphorically, it means if we could tolerate extreme physical harm and mental assault for an extended period of time, then we should be able to accomplish the greatest achievement and emerge a ‘sage’ (贤人).

In other words, these people still ground their concept of tolerance on the notion of a ‘self’ that tolerates numerous trials and tribulations to finally attain ‘sainthood’ (‘Gold’ in this case figuratively refers to becoming a saint).

Tolerance also means to repress one’s own desire and anger. Although it is relatively difficult to practise self-tolerance, unfortunately, such nature of tolerance is still considered to be imperfect, as there exists the notion of ‘self’, and we still have to suffer from lingering afflictions.

If there is an association of ‘self’ during the cultivation of tolerance, then there is still the presence of “the three wheels” (三轮) of the giver, the recipient and the given being attached to the practice of tolerance. As attachment is present and not in connection with emptiness, this results in even more suffering. That is to say, if there is a perception of ‘I’ during the cultivation of tolerance, then we could only attain the juncture of being a ‘sage’. From the perspective of Mahayana, this is still regarded as imperfect and is not the same as the saint stage of Buddha and Bodhisattva.

So what then is the meaning of tolerance in Buddhism? What is the difference in tolerance between the mundane world and supramundane world? In Sanskrit, it is known as *ksanti*. According to Ch'eng wei-shin lun in the *Treatise Establishing Vijnapti-matra*, there are three categories of tolerance, namely tolerating hateful insults, calmly accepting suffering, and carefully observing the Dharma. All these sentiments of accepting suffering calmly without hatred and even recognising the truth of Buddhism could be considered as the gist of tolerance. That is to say, believing and the realisation of all things as empty can be regarded as tolerance that pertains to wisdom. In Mahayana Buddhism, tolerance is of great importance too. It is especially relevant in the six paramitas or ten paramitas.

As stated, tolerance means being able to endure and realise all things as the phenomena of emptiness. If one can clearly and fully understand it, then one can be said to have acquired wisdom. Similarly, 'Tolerance' means harbouring no animosity and is parallel to compassion. Master Yin-Shun advocated: "Of all powers, compassion is the strongest and most compelling. With compassion, we are able to tolerate all sufferings and overcome all evil seductions."

My view is that the wisdom here means 'non-self' (emptiness) such as the theory of "the three wheels are emptiness" (三轮体空) in the perfection of giving – the giver, recipient and given must be in harmony with realisation of emptiness. In other words, in Mahayana Buddhism, practising tolerance is based on the concept of 'non-self' which is isolated from all worldly attachment. Hence, we become truly saint-like (圣人) only when we practise tolerance with absolute emptiness. It is legitimate to say that tolerance must be practised in accordance with emptiness and compassion, otherwise it's just another worldly dharma practice.



In addition, we also have to take note that cultivating the 'Perfection of Tolerance' (忍辱度) is not the same as pessimism, or the display of cowardice when one is being coerced and intimidated by others. Rather, it is practised out of the motivation to benefit from these circumstances, to caution and educate others so as to prevent them from creating negative karma for themselves. This is the practice of compassion.

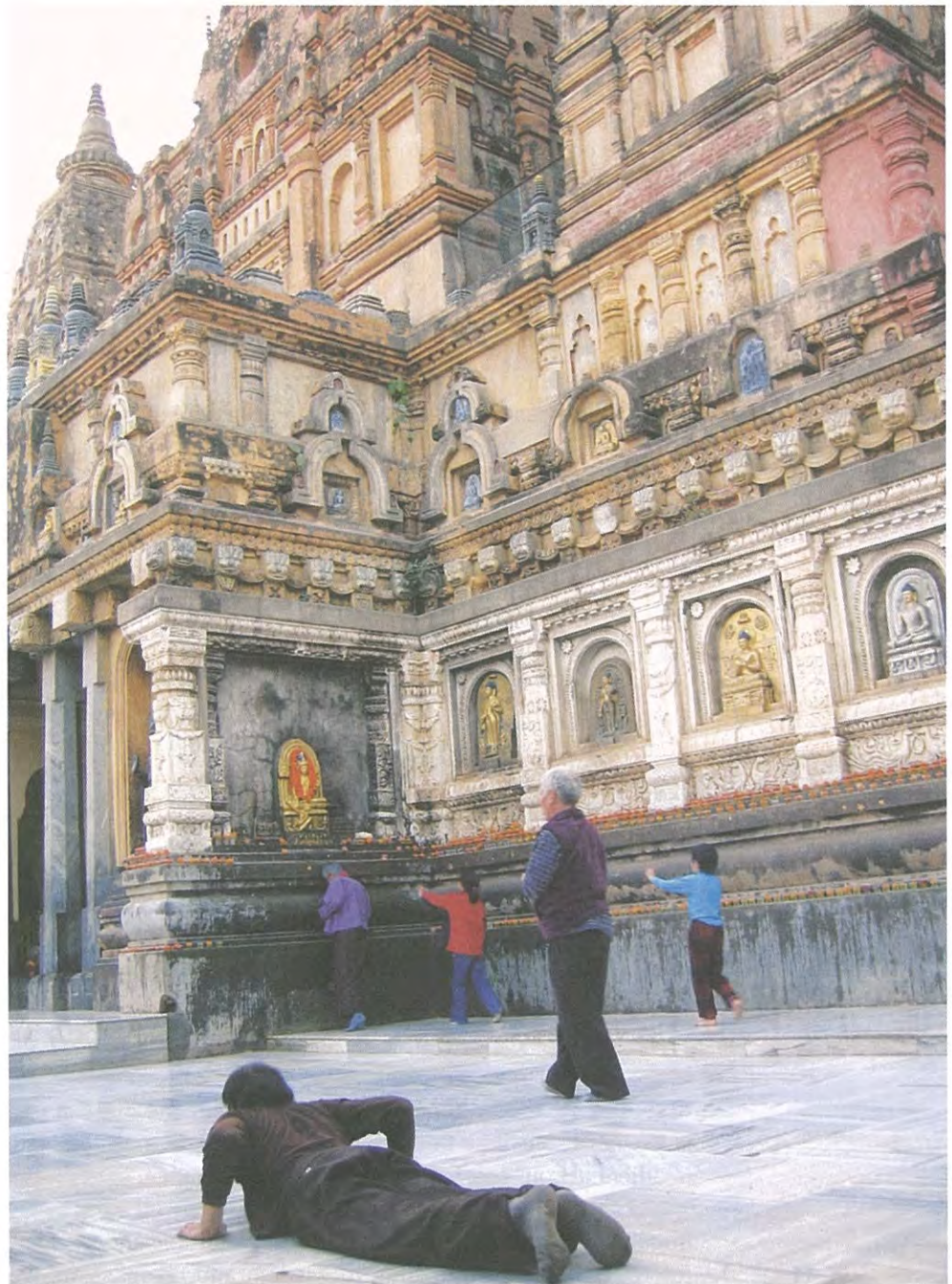
According to Master Yin-Shun, the reason that the Buddha encouraged us to practise tolerance is to urge us emulate Bodhisattvas who cultivate 'non-self' with great compassion. This practice is different from pessimism or emotional tolerance.

Buddhism promotes the cultivation of 'good fortune and wisdom' (福慧双修). In reality, cultivating tolerance not only correlates to wisdom and compassion, we are also able to accrue, at the same time, good fortunes for ourselves. According to Liu-tu-chi-ching (六度集经), enduring extreme and overwhelming situations is the origin of good fortunes.

All Bodhisattvas are dependent on the resolution of the Bodhicitta (菩提心) to cultivate the difficult path towards wisdom, and to endure difficult tolerance towards good fortune in order to completely abandon all afflictions and become a Buddha. Unfortunately, it is not that easy to transform words into actions. But, if we can always have the right mindfulness of 'non-self' (emptiness) to cultivate tolerance when we encounter physical and psychological obstructions, we can gradually fulfil this unfathomable concept in our daily lives.

This article is purely my personal humble view. It is my belief that we can practise the Perfection of tolerance together towards the goal of enlightenment.

May all sentient beings be well and happy always!



Why I am still a Buddhist

By Ananda Chen

It has been some nine years since I became a Buddhist, and it has been a trying journey.

I still remember when I first called myself a Buddhist, it was on the wings of a spirit that promised a new, fresh look at life. It grew into an intense wave of interest with much of the credit going to Ven Ajahn Brahmvamso whose eloquence and sincerity swept so many of us off our feet. Other illustrious speakers like Ven Thubten Chodron and Ven Pema Chodron also had much impact on me.

Sadly, over the years, my enthusiasm waned as I encountered many difficulties. Disheartened, I debated forsaking the faith. As a last resort, I joined the recently concluded pilgrimage to India headed by Ven Ajahn Brahmavamso. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. It rekindled my enthusiasm as I rose above all doubts. There was no magical encounter accompanied by emotional outpourings. In fact, I remained sceptical for all of the two weeks we were on the road. But insights dawned on me quietly through observation.

You see, through all the evident poverty, the grinding contrasts the Buddha's teachings made things fell into place. India, at least the India we saw was a veritable work of living history. Whatever the Buddha talked about some 2500 years ago still exists. The poverty, the squabbles, the fight for survival and the dignity of rising above it all like a lotus flower! These aspects of life are still as evident today as when the Buddha walked the earth!

Those flashes of insights woke me up and I was hooked on Buddhism once again, even though I'm still not a competent meditator. But that does not bother me anymore, as the insights I have gained there and then were more important.

I saw the dignity in poverty in a little Indian girl. The ragamuffin, all dirty and scraggy, was seated on a piece of cloth near her mother who was selling trinkets outside the temple at Bodh Gaya – the location where the Buddha gained Enlightenment. I was feeling down as I left the temple but when I saw that child, I was drawn to her

cherubic face. I reached to touch her cheek and she gave me the warmest, loveliest smile I have ever seen.

No amount of money, jewellery, or luxury goods can hide unhappiness, that much I know. Likewise, no amount of poverty, grime and rags can hide a heart full of love. That was what this little girl has.

I warmed up and began to tear. I had found my "Little Lotus", this blessed child. That was my first Dharma lesson from the School of Life. I think she was a deva sent by the Buddha.

As the tour progressed, I often drew inspiration from that face smiling at me in spite of the tenuous, even precarious situation of her family. Maybe I have got it wrong! She might lack material goods but she is full of hope and love. Could we be the deprived people instead?

I soon got my second lesson in Dharma. As I sat exhausted at the Museum at Patna where we paid homage to the Buddha's relics, I struck up a conversation with one of our group members. I nearly fell off my seat when Danny (not his real name) told me he was a Christian minister and that he had joined the pilgrimage to better understand the similarities between Christianity and Buddhism.



Danny, a resident of Canberra and a lay preacher of the Anglican Order, was fully switched on. He meditated, circumambulated and took in the Dharma discourses. Through it all, he showed an acceptance of Buddhism that was amazingly refreshing. I congratulated him on being sporting but he said that it was not a question of being sporting but rather, just going with the flow and the spirit of things. He remained steadfast to his faith while respecting ours. Good for you, Danny.

The lesson I learned through Danny was that when there is love (read respect), there should be no conflict. There should only be understanding and hope.

That's why I call him "the bridge". Danny went beyond tolerance. He practised acceptance. A conversation with him is like a "conversation" between the Buddha and Christ as written by Thich Nhat Hanh in his book, *Going Home*.

The third lesson was, however, a rude wakeup call! I saw a "monk" begging for money. That really shocked me as I thought that monks are not supposed to do so. We were in Lumbini when it happened. We were boarding the bus to take us back to the hotel when a saffron-clad "monk" pedalled furiously to catch us before we left. Bowl and all, he implored us to give him money. That episode sparked off a discussion of where Buddhism was heading.

Some felt that this was a blot on Buddhism but most thought that it was all part of Samsara. After all, the Lord Buddha himself had said that one thing we all have to conquer in life was greed. All religions have this problem in one form or other.

Finally, to round off the experience of the pilgrimage, I must mention the "power" of the holy places we visited. Personally, I did not experience any emotional tug but many in my group did. Some cried, some felt "high". Then

there was Yap from Perth, who when he developed his photos, saw "mandalas" on the prints! This was quite mind-boggling and it made even a sceptic like me believe. Right now, I have no doubt about the power of these places.

What has this trip done for me? It made me even more steadfast in my faith in the Buddha. The irritations, the inconsistencies will always be around but they won't detract me from the beauty of the Buddha's teachings and the need to practise.

Most symbolic of this trip was our visit to the Buddhist University at

Nalanda. The magnificent ruins still show adequately of the splendour of Buddhism. There, Buddhism flourished. Once, the university had attracted scholars and kings from around the region. But like all things impermanent, decline began, culminating in its destruction by the conquering warriors of another religion who razed the entire university. Despite all this, the University is still a symbol of the eternal truths taught by the Buddha.



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Photography: Clarence Lee

Interview with a Senior Buddhist Volunteer

Teng Jing Hua, an admirable selfless Buddhist volunteer in his late 60s, speaks to Esther Thien about helping other Buddhists and spending his golden years meaningfully.

Teng Jing Hua, or Uncle Jing Hua as he's affectionately known by younger ones, is not exactly your typical Singaporean 'uncle'. Aged 67 this year, he has dedicated his past 26 years to volunteering in Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery whenever time permits. Now, a partial retiree, this grandfather of two helps out with the occasional renovation project contracted to his company, and spends his time reading, hanging out with friends or volunteering in the temple.

Awaken talks to him about his lifelong dedication of helping in the monastery and of guiding others to understand more about the Dharma.

Awaken: When did you start volunteering, and what motivated you to help out in a monastery in the first place?

Jing Hua: I started volunteering in 1980. I loved to read when I was young, and was often immersed in philosophical

books as I had much free time then. One day, I chanced upon a book on Buddhist philosophy. Reading it made me realise that Buddhism is very much a scientific religion. It is very logical and nothing like what the misinformed public had made it out to be - a religion full of superstitions. That prompted me to find out more about Buddhism, and eventually motivated me to start volunteering in the temple when I was in my late thirties.

Awaken: What, do you think, is the difference between volunteering in a monastery, compared to helping out in a charitable organisation?

Jing Hua: Hmm, I guess it is the passion and dedication towards spiritual development, and helping others to understand Buddhism better. It is especially satisfying to discuss the Dharma and share with those who are just starting to learn about Buddhism. When they gain deeper understanding and greater faith in the Triple Gem or are



motivated to share the Dharma with others, that sense of fulfilment from knowing you have helped somebody is not something money can buy.

Awaken: How has helping out in a monastery benefited you? What are the insights you have acquired through volunteering?

Jing Hua: Well, firstly, I have more chances to hold in-depth and thought-provoking discussions with fellow Buddhists. I also have greater access to Buddhist books and more opportunities to practise chanting. Personally for me, chanting is very important as it helps me develop greater mindfulness. All this has definitely helped me to understand Buddhism better, and changed my temperament. I have become more mild-mannered and happier. It has also allowed me to put the Dharma to practice when I interact with others. For instance, when others gossip or make slandering remarks, understanding the emptiness of things and the pointlessness of speculation, I do my best to promote understanding and preserve equanimity. Knowing that one's state of mind is the cause for everything, including any suffering or unhappiness, I try my best to let go and not cling onto any phenomenon.

Awaken: So how often do you dedicate yourself to helping out in the temple? Does your family have any qualms or issues about you spending so much time in the monastery?

Jing Hua: Life has been kind. I've been working in the construction and renovation business since I was 18. I'm very fortunate as the past 26 years, I was able to volunteer my service whenever the monastery needed help - since I manage my own time as a businessman. I help out at least once a week during the

Sunday prayer service and all major events such as Vesak. As my whole family is Buddhist, including my wife, they have no issue about me devoting a large part of my time to the temple.

But a word of advice here. Before you devote much time in any voluntary work, especially during your prime years, be certain that you do not neglect your family. Always consider your spouse's feelings. Ensure they are well provided for and allocate time for them before you serve the community. This will create harmony in the family.

Awaken: You talk about the gratification you received as a volunteer, especially when others have a better understanding about Buddhism. Has that sense of satisfaction changed in any way over the years?

Jing Hua: Not that I know of. I still derive a great sense of well-being, contentment and satisfaction, perhaps even more so now, as I have more time to spare in my golden years to dedicate.

Awaken: So, will you encourage other elderly to take up voluntary work in a Buddhist organisation?

Jing Hua: Definitely! It is not just good for the organisation and the community, it is also good for the well-being of the elderly. Not only does volunteering allow them to exercise their old bones, they will foster close bonds with other volunteers. Feeling useful to society, they will not feel alienated. They will constantly learn new things such as teamwork, and lead more meaningful and fruitful lives. Plus, they can also develop spiritual anchorage in Buddhism and be less prone to throw themselves to despair when problems or difficulties arise in old age.

Come 20th of November, AWAKEN wishes all elderly a Happy Senior Citizens' Week



Kids! To Have or Not to Have Them?

Well-known for its monastic tradition, what is Buddhism's less known views on children and parenthood? To commemorate the upcoming Children's Day, Shen Shi'an explores the unique spiritual partnership between parents and children in this special feature.

Do you like kids? Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't. Sometimes, they are the most innocent and adorable creatures in the world. Other times, they are the most horrible bratty monsters. Every now and then, you can almost see the future Buddhas shining in their eyes. Yet occasionally, you can also almost see the "making" of Mara! Suddenly, I realise I was a child too, and thanks to my parents, I've become somewhat between a Buddha and Mara, somewhat moving in the right direction. So will I bring up a future Buddha or Mara myself?

The above question sums up the dilemma of many. I used to joke that when a person gets lonely, one tends to seek the companionship of another. Love and marriage might develop. But after a while, they tend to seek the company of another - which is why they have a kid or more. And when the kids grow up and move out, they long to cradle the offspring of their offspring - grandchildren. Of course, this may not apply to everyone, and there are countless other reasons to have children - some good and some not as good.

But this begs the question - "As Buddhists, are we encouraged to have children?" Well, I guess "different

strokes for different folks". To those who are prepared to lead the monastic way of life, the Buddha, as a skilful teacher, teaches the advantages of the monastic life. But for those who are not ready, the Buddha teaches how to have a happy family - with or without children, without compromising growth in the spiritual life.

Ask yourself this if you are unsure whether you want children - "Why do you want kids?" What is the reason or purpose? Is it to have someone to care for you, in old age? Or to have someone to care for? (Note the seemingly subtle yet vast world of difference - the first reason is selfish, while the latter selfless.) Most couples' rationale for having children is usually a combination of the above. It is the spiritual duty of both parents and parents-to-be to evolve their rationale from the first towards the latter. True parental love is unconditional - it does not even expect filial piety! On the other hand, it is the spiritual duty of children to never forget to repay the kindness of parental love - even if it was conditional!

It is interesting how the closest analogy the Buddha could give to describe pure love is that of parental love.

In the Metta Sutta (Discourse on Loving-Kindness), the Buddha beseeches us: "As a mother would risk her life to protect her child, her only child, even so should one cultivate a boundless heart with regard to all beings."

That is the Buddha's definition of pure and universal love - a love so pure that it nurtures everyone as if each was one's only child.

This means that no matter which roles we play in life, be it as children or parents, we should learn to love one other with this form of love, and radiate it beyond to encompass all other beings. While the Buddha hopes we will love in this manner, He tells us in the *Shurangama Sutra* that "The Buddhas of the ten directions are compassionately mindful of living beings just as a mother remembers her child." How very touching! All the Buddhas are perfectly practising what they are preaching! It is also intriguing to note that in the countless rounds of rebirth, we have been parents and children to one another. True filial piety then, is necessarily the practice of equanimous kindness to all beings!

Karmically, parents and their children deserve one another - so it is useless to point fingers at one another for our familial misfortunes. Instead, it would bring greater happiness and be more rewarding if we treasure one another and make the most of our collective karma as family. It is also a common mistake to think that children are "karmic debtors", who are born to give parents difficult times, to reclaim their "bad debts" from a previous life. Let's be objective - most children also give their parents much joy. Since, familial karma is usually mixed, we might as well embrace our collective karma graciously and transform it for the better, for both our existing family members and ourselves! Who knows, you may all return in your next lives as family!

According to Buddhism, it is also a misconception to say that children derive their characteristics through their parents genetically. Why is it then that many children resemble their parents physically and in character? Well, this is because those of similar karmic tendencies tend to attract one another to form kin and kith. Just like "birds of a feather flock together". It's the same theory. Genetic "inheritance" is just an illusion. So if you blame your quick-tempered father for passing down his bad temperamental genes to you, think again! It's all of your own making.

In this way, life naturally and continually presents us with

the lessons we need to learn the most. Ask yourself this. Do you reactively flare up and rebut, or do you stop to reflect that you're just like your father when you experience his quick temper? If we can conscientiously bring the vicious cycle of mutually-offensive defilements to a halt, our relationship with our parents will only transform for the better. Remember everything's dynamic - a parent-child relationship is the result of both nature (personal past karma ripening) and nurture (newly created karma) in the moment, dependent on our interaction with each other.

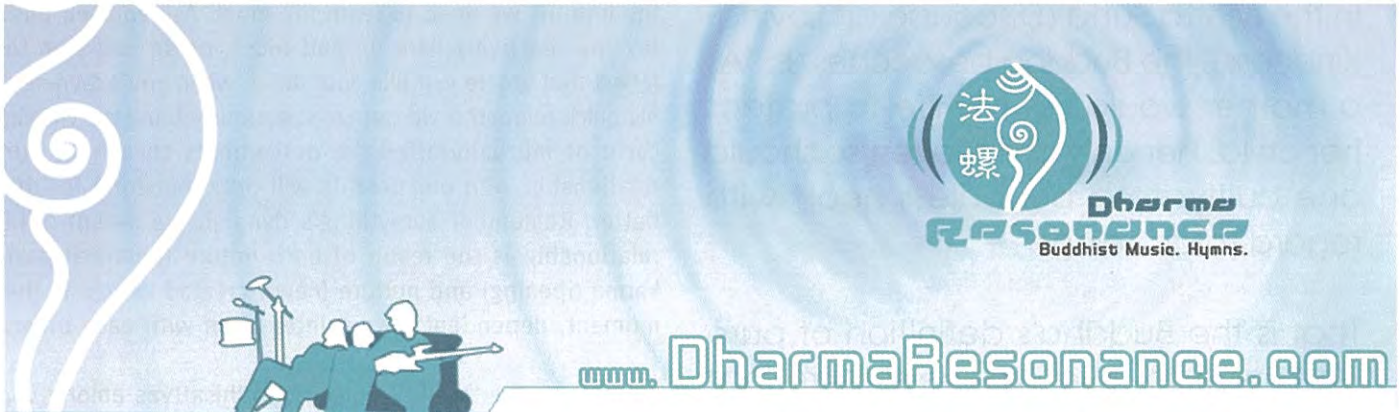
Other than the "well-disguised" Bodhisattvas among us, we are all children of Samsara, born of the three poisons (attachment, aversion and delusion), born by parents with the three poisons, born into this world with the three poisons. Yet, at the same time, we also have something precious in us - Buddha-nature - the potential to attain perfect enlightenment. It is with this invaluable human rebirth that we can steadily eradicate the three poisons - whether as a parent or a child. Let's help one another then, by nurturing one another to be future Buddhas.

True parental concern and filial piety is the leading of one other towards Buddhahood, by connecting one other to the Dharma.

It is not simply the conventional manner of parents giving children a generous monthly allowance when they're young and vice versa when they're old!

Among the best spiritual lessons any human being can ever have are those we learn from caring for another human being - from his or her cradle to our, or their grave, depending on who passes on first. To bring up our children using the Dharma, and to teach our children the Dharma is to practise the Dharma itself. It is the noble and voluntary resolution to help them use the golden opportunity of their precious human life to learn and practise the equally precious Dharma. Yes, the process will not always be smooth-sailing. Like any other worthy aspect of the Bodhisattva path of benefiting others, it is bound to have its share of many heartbreaking and heart-warming moments. But if it's worth it, it's worth it.

May you, your parents and your children, if you have any, lead spiritually-fulfilling lives which benefit one other. May we all bring up quality children with the Dharma, little Bodhisattvas who make this world a better and more harmonious place. With the right motivation of having children, we too are like Bodhisattvas! Will you be a Bodhisattva parent to Bodhisattva children, who may continually "test" your patience? You decide!



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This project is an initiative by Bodhicitta in collaboration with Shan You Counselling Centre, sponsored and supported by Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery.

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-Albert Einstein

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Even commercial movies can be a catalyst for spiritual awakening, for the Dharma is everywhere.

Seen

Star Wars Episode 3 Revenge of the Sith

Directed by : George Lucas

Starring : Ewan McGregor, Natalie Portman,
Hayden Christensen, Christopher Lee

You may be surprised, but you can actually find many Dharma-inspired elements in *Episode III: The Revenge of the Sith*. It tells a futuristic yet timeless myth of how one can easily succumb to the dark side through unguarded attachment, aversion and delusion.

Fearing the loss of his beloved wife Padmé Amidala after a vision of her death, Anakin Skywalker learns the dark arts in the hope of averting it. Ironically, his fear, which eventually mutates into hatred, becomes the very cause of her death. Despite the good Dharma-like advice of Yoda, Anakin chooses to forsake “the force” – his Buddha-nature – and lets his defilements grow. Instead of becoming the Bodhisattva-like Jedis that he initially strove towards, he allows his attachment to Padmé override compassion for the masses. By the end of Episode III, Anakin had become the monster that is Darth Vader, the darkest personification of the dark side in Star Wars. It is also interesting to note how Padmé Amidala, a key character, has her name rooted in Buddhist terminology; for “Padmé” means “lotus” in Sanskrit, the symbol of purity in Buddhism, and “Amida” in the name “Amidala”, is the Japanese name of Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of infinite light and life, who is also synonymous with the Dharmakaya, the universal aspect of all Buddhas’ existence.



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Lemony Snicket's “A Series of Unfortunate Events”

Directed by: Brad Silberling

Starring: Jim Carrey, Meryl Streep, Emily Browning

In this film, the Baudelaire children lose their home and parents in a mysterious fire, after which they are unwittingly placed in the guardianship of Count Olaf. Unfortunately, he is more interested in their inheritance than their welfare. The children are forced to use their inventive wisdom to outsmart each of Olaf's ploys to kill them. Because Olaf is continually outwitted, every “unfortunate event” becomes fortunate.

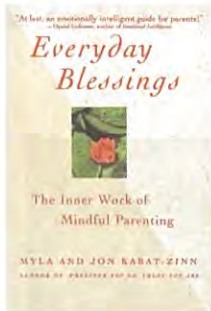
Filmed with elaborate sets in gloomy yet interesting hues of dirty brown, black and grey, it ironically strikes the audience that the darkest moments of the children's lives were also their most “colourful” and fulfilling, sending them reeling freely into adventure and strengthening their sibling bonds. Just as what the late Baudelaire parents had wisely advised in a letter left for their children (“At times the world can seem an unfriendly and sinister place. But believe us when we say there is much more good in it than bad. And what might seem to be a series of unfortunate events, may in fact, be the first steps of a journey.”), there is in truth no such thing as an endless series of unfortunate events for our blessings always seep in between our misfortunes. Every cloud has a silver lining. Things change; nothing lasts forever. Since the “unfortunate” can lead to the “fortunate” and vice versa, why be too hung up on either? Indeed, there's always a solution in our darkest hour, a better alternative than to plunge into despair... if only we look hard enough.



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Read

Let your kids grow up following the Buddha's footsteps of Love, Compassion and Wisdom.

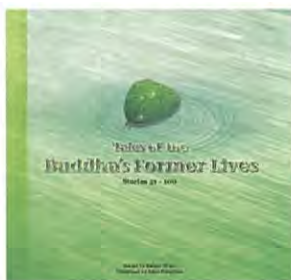


Everyday Blessings

The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting

By Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn

Everyday Blessings is a wonderful little gem that teaches about the beauty of mindful parenting. Using the Dharma, it shows how, with awareness, you can transform parenting into a spiritual practice and cultivation. Priced S\$27.90, this book is available for sale at Awareness Place.



Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

Edited by Esther Thien

If you're looking for a book to give your child this Children's Day, try *Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives*. Originated from a collection of stories known as the *Jataka Tales*, these simple stories, written in a style similar to *Aesop's Fables*, are meant for readers of all ages. However, they are especially useful to older children and teenagers, as these stories promote and highlight virtuous conduct and wisdom, especially those human values that contribute to harmony, well-being and progress. Produced for free distribution, you can find this book at Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery or Awareness Place.

Heard

Teaching your kids the Dharma can be a fun experience with these CDs.



Come & See

Produced by Viriya Production

The first ever story-based English Buddhist album for kids, this CD, which consists of 25 easy and melodious sing-along tracks with story-telling, chronicles the life of Prince Siddhartha from His birth to Enlightenment. "Within the second run of the CD, my 5-year old daughter could sing along to most songs, put a name to Shakyamuni Buddha, and even learn about the 4 important sights and the Middle Path in a fun way," says Karen Chin, a mother of one. Only S\$17.00, you can get this CD from Awareness Place.



Da Hui Ji

Marketed by Xin Leow Liang Pte Ltd

If you're looking for a Mandarin Buddhist DVD for older children, a good one to try is *Da Hui Ji*. Accompanied by bright, fun and colourfully animated cartoons, this children album consists of 2 segments – a sing-along karaoke session of popular Buddhist chants such as the *Heart Sutra* and the *Great Compassion Mantra*, and 25 witty, thought-provoking short Zen stories involving 4 monks. Retail at S\$16.00 at Awareness Place.



Chan Qu Part I & II

Produced by Singapore Buddhist Federation

Chan Qu is another good Mandarin Buddhist CD for kids. This collection of 4 CDs contains 56 vivid Zen stories interspersed with music and lively dialogues. Your kid will be mesmerised by the interesting and meaningful stories. Sells at S\$18.90 at Awareness Place.



The roots of all goodness lie in the soil
of appreciation for goodness.

- *His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama*

As everything changes from moment to moment,
nothing can be clung to.

A moment's mindfulness of this
is a moment of freedom.

- *stonepeace*

Do always remember causes and effects
and tolerate others' mistakes.

You can win others' trust and respect
only if you create good karma with them.

- *Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

When the mind is pure, the land is pure.

- *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutta*

The problem is not that we are in Samsara,
but that we are samsaric.

- *stonepeace*

A good friend who points out mistakes
and imperfections and rebukes evil

is to be respected as if
he reveals a secret of hidden treasure.

- *The Buddha*

We work on ourselves in order to help others,
but also we help others in order to work on ourselves.

- *Pema Chodron*

Those who see worldly life as an obstacle to Dharma*
see no Dharma in everyday actions.

They have not yet discovered that there are
no everyday actions outside of Dharma.

- *Zen Master Dogen*

* *Practice of the Buddha's teachings
of Compassion & Wisdom*



A Good Heart Begets a Good Life

A good heart and a good life
will bring riches and honour to a long life

A bad heart and a good life
will see blessings turn to disaster

A good heart and a bad life
will see disaster transformed into blessings

A bad heart and a bad life
will bring disaster and poverty

The heart can change a life
Best to remain on the road of benevolence

Life is formed in the heart
A person creates his/her own fortune or misfortune

Believing in destiny without cultivating the heart
And all will prove superficial and false

Cultivating the heart upon hearing destiny
One will be protected by heaven and earth

Anatta: Selflessness (non-self or impersonality). All phenomena is without self-nature. Nothing exists on its own as a separate self. As the so-called self is simply a collection of conditioned and changing physical and mental factors, there is no real or concrete element of self in us.

Anicca: The truth of the constant changing of all mind and matter from moment to moment

Ascetic: One who practises asceticism, or the practice of living very frugally. The practice of extreme asceticism goes to the extent of putting the body through great pain in order to transcend it, to attain liberation from all suffering. The Buddha tried this practice before attaining Enlightenment, pronouncing it to be useless.

Bodhicitta: The aspiration to help all beings attain True Happiness by becoming Buddhas, by being Bodhisattvas.

Bodhisattva: One who aspires to save all beings from suffering, while saving oneself.

Buddha: An aspect of the Triple Gem - The Awakened or Enlightened One. A Buddha is one who has attained liberation from all suffering, attaining True Happiness, Perfect Wisdom and Perfect Compassion, among all other virtues for the sake of helping all sentient beings. "The Buddha" refers to the historical Shakyamuni or Gautama Buddha, who is the founder of Buddhism in our world.

Buddha Nature: The potential of being a Buddha in all of us - the Buddha within us.

Compassion: The quality that makes us aspire to help others with no selfish intention; the ending of selfishness.

Compassionate: Possessing the quality of 'Compassion'.

Dana: The practice of giving, of generosity.

Defilements: Our negative qualities - chiefly Greed (Craving), Hatred (Aversion) and Ignorance (Delusion).

Delusion: See 'Ignorance'.

Deva: A heavenly being or deity

Dharma: An aspect of the Triple Gem - the teachings of the Buddha or the general teachings of Buddhism.

Dhammapada: A collection of sayings by the Buddha.

Dukkha: The truth that life is full of dissatisfactory experiences

Enlightenment: The realisation of the reality of all things as they truly are. True Happiness is the result.

Emptiness: The truth of all mind and matter constantly changing, thus being empty of any fixed self.

Equanimity: The calm and balanced state of mind of not being affected by attachment or aversion to anything.

Five Precepts: The basic guidelines of moral conduct - not killing, not stealing, not having sexual misconduct, not lying and not taking intoxicants.

Hua Tou: A Zen or Chan question used for meditation

Ignorance: The quality of lacking Wisdom, not knowing the reality of all things. Same as 'delusion'.

Impermanence: All compounded things are constantly changing, as a result or effect of changing causes and conditions. All living and non-living elements are thus subject to decay and renewal.

Karma: The moral law of cause and effect which states that what we experience is the result of what we had done, that what we do will result in what we will experience.

Karmic: Pertaining to 'Karma' or relating to it.

Loving-kindness: The quality which makes us wish for the happiness and well-being of others.

Mara: Embodiment of unskillfulness, forces of greed, hatred and delusion and the "death" of the spiritual life. He is a tempter, distracting us from practising the spiritual life by making the mundane alluring or the negative seem positive. In historical Buddhism, Mara is the demon that tempted Shakyamuni Buddha, just before he attained Enlightenment, trying to seduce him with his beautiful daughters.

Metta: See 'Loving-kindness'.

Mindfulness: An aspect of the 'Noble Eightfold Path' - the quality that enables us to remember, and keep our awareness and attention on what is beneficial to one and all in terms of thoughts, speech and actions.

Mindful: Possessing the quality of 'Mindfulness'.

Nirvana: The attainment of release from suffering and rebirth.

Pureland: A world without defilements created by a Buddha out of Compassion, for sentient beings to seek birth in, to perfect the practice of the Dharma. The best known being Sukhavati Pureland created by Amitabha Buddha.

Rebirth: The continual cycle of birth and death.

Samsara: This world of rebirth and suffering. Also known as Saha world

Sangha: An aspect of the Triple Gem - the holy community of monks and nuns.

Sentient Beings: Living beings with feelings in the six Samsara realms of hells, ghosts, animals, humans, demi-gods and gods.

Suffering: The physical and mental feeling of dissatisfaction.

Sutra (s): The recorded teachings of the Buddha. Spelt as Sutta in Pali language.

Theravada: A foundational school of Buddhism.

Threefold Refuge: Taking refuge in the Triple Gem.

Triple Gem: The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

Venerable: An honorific addressing of a member of the Sangha.

Zen: A school of Buddhism. Also known as Chan.

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May the Dharma bring light to your life!