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Celebrating Love

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the first issue of AWAKEN for the year 2006. To streamline operation, we have decided to go for a new cover look that combines both the English and Chinese editorials.

In this issue, we celebrate love in its many forms, the highest of which is the perfect Compassion of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

If you are looking at how to overcome the roadblocks that life presents, read what Zen Master Sheng Yen has to say on page 41. To understand why honesty is really a New Year resolution you should undertake, read page 51.

As this issue coincides with Valentine's Day in February, and Mother's Day in May, the team at AWAKEN would like to wish all a happy Valentine's and Mother's Day. May all bask in the blessings of gratitude and the bliss of unconditional love of our parents and the Triple Gem.

May all never forget and ever be mindful of the support and the love showered by all we meet - our parents, our teachers, Mother Nature, our siblings, our friends, co-workers and even those we dislike (for they have kindly given us an opportunity to practise patience).

Let's us all love unconditionally, without attachment, giving it freely to all we encounter on the path of life, just like the Bodhisattvas are infinitely compassionate to us. May all sentient beings be well, be happy. And may all progress well on the path of the Dharma!

Happy reading.



Yours in the Dharma,
Sister Esther Thien



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**1. Exploring Buddhism
(Basic Course in English)**
**2. Stages of the Path to Enlightenment
(Intermediate Course in English)**

Fees : S\$20
 Venue : 3rd Floor, Ven Hong Choon Memorial Hall
 Date/Time : **Basic Course**
 1 Feb 06 – 19 Apr 06 (Every Wednesday)
 7.30pm – 9.30pm
Intermediate Course
Module 1: 2 Feb 06 – 20 Apr 06
 7.30pm – 9.30pm (Every Thursday)
Module 2: 13 July 06 – 28 Sept 06
 7.30pm – 9.30pm (Every Thursday)
Module 3: 19 Oct 06 – 23 Nov 06;
 4 Jan 07 – 8 Feb 07
 7.30pm – 9.30pm (Every Thursday)
 Details : Please call 6849 5300, visit www.kmspks.org,
 or e-mail apmc@awarenessplace.com to enquire.

Monthly Group Mani Recitation

Fees : Free
 Venue : 3rd floor, Ven Hong Choon Memorial Hall
 Date/Time : 12 Feb, 14 Mar, 12 Apr 05, 12 May 06,
 7.30pm – 9.30pm
 Details : Please call 6849 5300, visit www.kmspks.org,
 or e-mail events@kmspks.org to enquire.

Monthly Eight Precepts Retreats

Fees : Donation of any amount is welcome
 Venue : 4th floor, Ven Hong Choon Memorial Hall
 Date/Time : Dates to be confirmed, 8.30am – 9.00pm
 Details : For more information about dates, please call
 6849 5300, visit www.kmspks.org, or e-mail
events@kmspks.org to enquire.

Yoga Fasting Retreat (12 Sessions)

Fees : To be advised
 Venue : Pulau Bersah Malaysia, Johor
 Date/Time : May
 Details : For more information on date, time and fees,
 please call Luck Kheng at 6849 5316 or e-mail
pualk@kmspks.org.

**Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery
Opening Ceremony**

Fees : Free
 Venue : Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery
 Date/Time : 3 Mar 06, 9.00am
 Details : For more information, please visit
www.kmspks.org from late February

Put Fun and Laughter in your Parenting Today

Speaker : Ms Tan Yen Yen
 Fees : \$18 (Husband & Wife) / \$10 (Individual)
 Venue : TLC Student Care Centre (Ang Mo Kio)
 Blk 621 Ang Mo Kio Ave 9 #01-68
 Date/Time : 6 Jan 06, 7.30pm – 9.30pm (Friday)
 Details : Please call Jane at 6849 5317 or 9127 5748 or
janetay@kmspks.org to register or enquire.

**1. General Yoga (12 sessions)
2. Intermediate Yoga (12 sessions)
3. Kidz Yoga (10 sessions)**

Fees : To be advised
 Venue : To be advised
 Date/Time : **3 Jan – 28 Mar 06**
 7.30pm – 9.00pm (Every Tuesday)
4 Jan – 22 Mar 06
 7.30pm – 9.00pm (Every Wednesday)
8 Jan – 19 Mar 06
 9.30am – 11.30 am (Every Sunday)
4 Apr – 20 Jun 06
 7.30pm – 9.00pm (Every Tuesday)
5 Apr – 21 Jun 06
 7.30pm – 9.00pm (Every Wednesday)
2 Apr – 18 Jun 06
 9.30am – 11.30 am (Every Sunday)
 Details : Please call Luck Kheng at 6849 5316 or e-mail
pualk@kmspks.org to register or enquire.

Spiritual Intimacy Retreat

Fees : To be advised
 Venue : To be advised
 Date/Time : 13 Apr – 16 Apr 06
 Details : Please call Luck Kheng at 6849 5316 or e-mail
pualk@kmspks.org to register or enquire about
 this marriage series conducted by Ms Tan Yen
 Yen.

**1. Hatha Yoga for Beginners
2. Intermediate Hatha Yoga
3. Massage to Soothe
4. Ayurvedic Cleansing
5. Organic Recipes Workshop
6. Fountain of Youth**

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 Feb 2005
 onwards

Why Do Buddhists Pray?

Q: Why do Buddhists pray? How should one practise Buddhist prayer? Are there any merits to it? If yes, why and how do we dedicate the merits?
- *Confused*

A: Buddhists pray to make an aspiration to the Triple Gem. The prayer also acts as a reflection upon the Buddha's words of wisdom, His qualities and His activities. In addition, it is a source of blessing, as one will experience a sense of peace and clarity if one regularly does the prayer wholeheartedly.

In this busy modern day, recitation or praying is greatly encouraged for Buddhists who would like to find time to practise the Dharma. When a prayer is conducted with a devoted and focused mind, it helps the Buddhist cultivate his/her virtues as the prayer contains the training of discipline and concentration to aid in the development of wisdom.

There are different prayers from Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism. But all usually comprise of refuge-taking in the Triple Gem, sometimes with the making of offerings, the main text of the Buddha's teachings and the dedication of merits. The practice of repentance in personal faults, rejoicing in the merits of others and the requesting of teachers to remain, and to teach can also be included. Buddhists of the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions also often practise chanting the Buddhas' name and reciting mantras as part of their prayers, for example, "Na Mo Ah Mi Tuo Fo" (Homage to Amitabha Buddha) or the mani mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum".

All prayer bestow merits when one prays with a pure motivation. Especially, when the prayer is done with compassion, with the sole intention to benefit others, the merits accrued are immeasurable. However, it is advised that you dedicate the merits of your practice for the benefit

of all sentient beings at the end of each prayer session. Not only are you practising the perfection of giving (dana) when you dedicate, you will also unwittingly accumulate more merits for yourself when you share them with all sentient beings. Otherwise, you might "burn" away most of your merits when the "fire" of anger arises.

To dedicate merits, we can recite a dedication verse. One very good verse is:

Just as the great Bodhisattvas of the past like Manjushri and Samantabhadra dedicate their merits, I perfectly follow and emulate them, by thoroughly dedicating every virtue to all sentient beings.

Even if we do not chant any dedication, a mere single thought or wish arising from the pure motivation of sharing the merits you have with all beings would suffice and benefit all.

- Ven Chuan Xian

Q: If one has a heart or brain transplanted from another, is this person still the same?
- *Curious*

A: Whether there is any transplant or not, there is no fixed identity for any person - because his mind and matter (body) are changing all the time, even if they are too subtle to be detected with an ordinary state of mind.

The heart and brain, though very vital organs for our physical existence, are not the "residences" of the mind. They are often mistaken as "the seat of the soul", but there is no "soul" or any enduring entity as the mind is without form and changes all the time.

When the mind places attention at a certain part of the body, the consciousness (mind) is focused there; however, the mind does not reside in any particular area of the body. It can even exist without or away from the body. It is the consciousness that makes the main difference in personality (which changes), not the brain or heart. Rebirth can be seen as the natural "transplanting" of consciousness from an expired body to a new one.

- 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@kmspk.org or send your letters to:

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

Making Mooncake Magic

By Grace Koh

What better way to celebrate the Mid-autumn Festival than by making your own sweet treats?

A week before the 15th day of the eighth lunar month, 90 volunteers from Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery comprising of young couples, mothers and fathers with bright-eyed children in tow, and grey-haired aunties and uncles, made their way to the monastery's volunteer centre to learn how to make mooncakes.

By 2pm, the volunteers had gathered in a huge room decorated with blinking lights and colourful lanterns, and were soon eagerly mixing flour with water to form a sticky dough. Golf ball-sized pieces of dough were then flattened with rolling pins. Next, the participants added lotus paste and mixed nuts before encasing each in mango-flavoured



skins. Lastly, a wooden mould was used to lovingly shape the dough into intricate little mooncakes.

Clouds of flour enveloped the room as the giggling participants knocked the little mooncakes from their wooden moulds. At the end of the lesson, each participant took home three little cakes, symbolising "San Bao" - or the Triple Gem. "We organised this event as a way to thank the volunteers for their kind contribution to the Monastery. It was a way to give something back to these people who have contributed their time and effort in making KMSPKS a better place," says Mr Clarence Lee, the Volunteer Affairs Manager.

Mango Mooncake *provided by Charmaine Koh*

Ingredients:

A: 120g Hong Kong flour
120g friend glutinous flour
180g icing sugar
1 1/2 tbs vegetable shortening
9 tbs cool water
1 1/2 tsp mango essence
1/4 tsp orange colouring
1/2 tsp yellow colouring

B: 3 tbs flour and 3 tbs boiling water to mixed into dough

C: 750g of mango paste and 26g of nuts to form paste balls

Method:

- 1 Steam Hong Kong flour for 20 minutes. Sieve.
- 2 Mixed ingredients A and B together into dough.
- 3 Cut dough into balls weighing 24g. Flatten dough balls and wrap paste ball in the centre to form a ball.
- 4 Press dough ball into mould. Knock the bottom of mould twice to remove the mooncake.
- 5 Serve immediately or chill for 30 minutes, and let rest for 15 minutes before serving.

A Bigger Brain Through Meditation

By Esther Thien

It's official. Regular meditation has demonstrated to add bulk in a brain region that is crucial to thoughts and emotions. In a new study presented recently at the annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience, researchers found sections of the cerebral cortex, the outer layer of the brain, to be thicker in people who practise meditation. This thickening could be why people experience a reduction in stress and blood pressure levels, and helps keep some parts of ageing, such as memory loss, at bay.

In this study, researchers compared structural magnetic resonance images of the brains of 20 people who have been doing the Buddhist insight meditation, or Vipassana meditation, for an average of nine years, with those of a control group of 15. The former consists of subjects who meditated for about 45 minutes, six days a week while the latter are non-meditators.

Those who meditated frequently were discovered to have an increased thickness in the insula, an area pivotal to integrating thoughts and emotions. Most of the increased thickening was also located in the right hemisphere - the prefrontal cortex - which sustains attention

and regulates memory. These areas usually thin as people age, so one hypothesis is that meditation might slow age-related brain loss.

Years of practising meditation also influenced areas controlling heart rate and breathing. Three of the 20 meditators who practised yoga besides meditation were also found to have even greater increases in brain thickness.



Are you worried?

Are you **miserable** and **depressed**?

Do you wonder **how you can subdue** and **prevent anger**?

Or how you can **overcome your problems, difficulties**
and the challenges you face in life?

Do you yearn for words of **timeless truth** that talk straight into your heart?

Everyone wants to be happy and free of problems. The free Dharma books published by Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery tell you simply and clearly how you can achieve happiness in this life and the next..

To get these gems, visit Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery and Awareness Place at Bras Basah Complex #01-63 or log on to <http://www.kmspks.org/publication>

May the Dharma bring light to your life!

Vegetarian Clay Pot Rice 驰名素食砂煲饭



Ingredients

6 pcs of Chinese Mushroom - soaked in water, diced and blended
 6 pcs of Fresh Button Mushroom - sliced and washed clean
 60g of Fresh Needle Mushrooms - removed old stems
 8 pcs of Fresh Chestnut - shelled and diced
 10 pcs of Ginkgo Nuts - shelled with shoots removed
 300g of White Rice - washed and let dry
 500cc of Stock/water
 Light Soya Sauce
 Sesame Oil

Method

1. Add light soya sauce into the heated oil with Chinese mushrooms, fry till fragrant. Put in other mushrooms, chestnuts and ginkgo nuts and fry for 3 mins. Add in the rice and stir fry till evenly mixed.
2. Put the rice in the clay pot and leave to set overnight.
3. Fill with stock or water till water level is slightly lower than the food surface. Flatten the surface.
4. Cook over slow fire for 30 mins (Check if water is sufficient when it is almost cooked). Add in sesame oil, mix well and serve.

Serves: 4

用料

6朵香菇 - 浸软、切粒、搅碎
 6颗鲜蘑菇 - 洗净、切片
 60克鲜金针菇 - 洗净、切去老蒂、然后撕开
 8颗生栗子 - 去壳、去膜、切粒
 10颗白果 - 去壳、去膜、去苦心
 300克香米 - 洗净、滤干水分
 500cc上汤/清水
 酱油、麻油 - 少许

做法

1. 油少许加入酱油把香菇慢火炒香，加入其他菇类、栗子及白果翻炒3分钟。再加入白米炒匀。
2. 将锅中米、菇等置入砂煲内，让它搁置一个晚上。
3. 注入上汤或清水，分量略比全部食物少一点，铺平材料。
4. 小火煮煮约30分钟（将熟时查看水分是否足够），加入麻油混调均匀即成。

份量：4人

Taking vegetarian dishes is a great way to kick-start the new year. Swop the ingredients with organic foodstuff and they can also have a cleansing and detoxifying effect.

Here are two simple dishes from the temple's cooking class that you may like to try your hand at.

Crispy Needle Mushroom 酥炸金针菇



Ingredients

5 pkts of fresh Golden Needle Mushroom
 200g of Potato Starch Flour
 500ml of Cooking Oil

Method

1. Cut off old stems from the mushroom, separate them, wash and let dry.
2. Pour flour onto the mushrooms and mix them well in a big bowl.
3. Heat oil in a wok and deep fry mushrooms till golden brown.

Serves: 10

用料

3包鲜金针菇
 200克生粉
 500毫升生油(供油炸之用)

做法

1. 将鲜金针菇切去根部较老部分、撕开、洗净、晾干。
2. 把金针菇放入大盆中，加入生粉调匀。
3. 热锅中倒入生油烧热，分数次把金针菇炸至金黄色。
4. 捞起、上盘，加上装饰点缀即成。

份量：10人

Intermediate Vegetarian Cooking Class will start on 8 Jan 06. Please call 6849 5332 to register or enquire.

With the spirit of compassion and wisdom, Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery set up **TLC Student Care Centre (TLCSCC)** for community outreach to children and parents of any race and religion.

At TLCSCC, we believe that complementing the present education system with a balanced approach of nurturing a child's Self-Esteem, Mental Attitude and Ethical Conduct can better help the child to face challenges in life.

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We believe that every child is a Genius. When a child is born, each child has his unique immense potential and innate talents waiting to be uncovered. As educators, we create the environment that continuously motivates and stimulates each child for a zest of learning in life. With such approaches, coupled with Tender Loving Care, your child will develop his/her potential to the fullest and will definitely excel! Allow TLCSCC to be part of that grooming process for the geniuses of tomorrow!

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*Eves of New Year, Chinese New Year & Christmas

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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:

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

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



Overcoming Life's Roadblocks

Zen Master Sheng Yen tells us how we can overcome the obstacles we face in life in a 2-day talk conducted at Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery.

Faith, Ethics & Dealing with Daily Life

In this talk, we are going to talk about life's roadblocks and how to overcome them. But first, tell me, is Buddhism a religion? It is, but it also consists of three functions – faith, life and ethics. These three should be based on knowledge and the methods of practice.

All religions emphasise on cultivation. For instance, some religions pray for rain when there are droughts. They also pray for solutions when there are epidemics, or dangers and difficulties. People pray to solve all their problems, and on their deathbeds. We deal with all of life's challenges and roadblocks by praying.

What about Buddhists? Do they resort to faith? The answer is yes. Some pray to the Buddha of Medicine when they wish to have longevity. They pray to Goddess of Mercy or Guanyin Bodhisattva when they desire safety, and to Amitabha Buddha when they want to be born in the Pureland of the West. They also pray for a smooth and prosperous life. But actually,

Photography: John Woo Wee Kuan

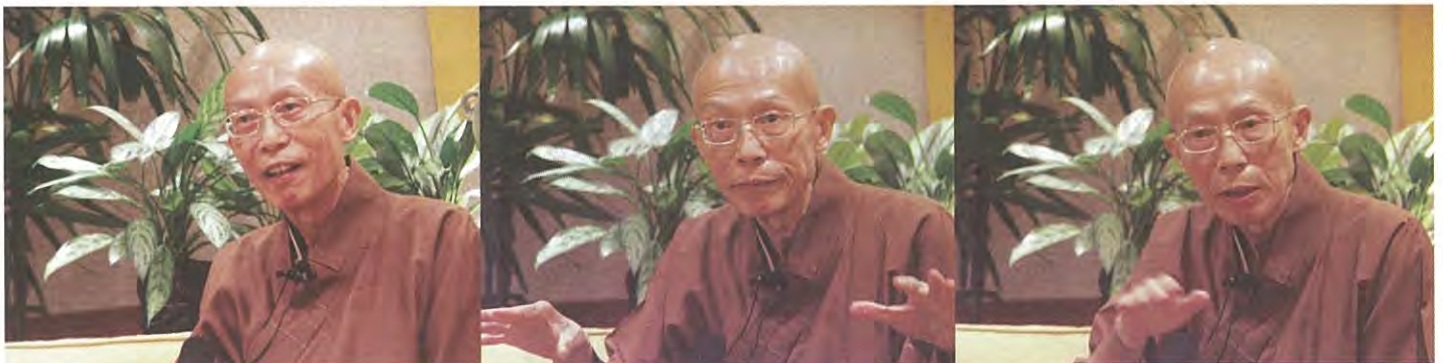
what Buddhists need to do is apply the teachings of the Buddha in their daily lives to adjust their ideas and attitudes to different situations.

And this means following the precepts of no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying or harming others with speech, and not getting addicted to intoxicants or gambling. These are the basic moral ethics a Buddhist should abide by as part of practice in daily life.

Cultivation to purify one's mind is also important. This is because when one faces an unhappy event or encounters a problem in life, one's emotions fluctuate. This harms the body and mind. Thus, we need to learn how to calm our mind through various methods. For example, you may have observed anger and worry arising when you encounter a difficult situation. But actually worry and anger do not solve the problem, so as Buddhists, we need to learn how

beautiful, others ugly. Some get paid well for working short hours, while others slog hard but receive a meagre salary. Take myself for example. I have five other older siblings who were born healthier than me. Because of my poor health, I became a monk, but I was also the one with the greatest achievement among my brothers and sisters. It appears that I enjoy a more successful "career" than my siblings, is it "fair" to them? So actually, it is not easy to tell what is "fair" and what is not.

According to the Buddhist perspective of cause and effect, as explained by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, if you believe there is a past, present and future life, you will believe that before you were born in this life, there were already many past lives preceding this and that your life in the present is actually only a small, tiny, short segment of these continuous samsaric cycles of births and deaths in different realms, in worlds of different sentient beings.



to handle them. We can recite Amitabha Buddha's name (Na Mo Ah Mi Tuo Fo) or we can chant Guanyin Bodhisattva's name (Na Mo Guan Shi Yin Pu Sa). Focusing on the chanting of a Buddha's name may help to calm us down and allow us to deal with the situation better when we encounter, difficult people, circumstances or challenges in life.

So remember, being a Buddhist means that we should equip ourselves with three conditions. The first, faith. The second, moral or ethical principles that we abide by. And the third, is the way that helps us deal with different situations and turn them around.

Inequality of Life

In addition, you may have also noticed that nothing in this world is really, really equal and "fair". Some are born

We may have owed people "debts" in our past lives, and need to repay them in this life. Even if we do not repay them in this life, we may have to repay them in the next life. It's just like putting money in the bank. We deposit it, we retrieve it later for use. Thus, if we had established positive karmic relationships and affinity with other sentient beings in our past life, we will be rewarded with good karma in this life (or the next). On the other hand, if we had established negative karma or affinity with other people, then in this life (or the next) we may suffer from the karmic results of mishaps, calamities and difficulties. If one believes in rebirth, then one will be able to accept the consequences we are facing in this life.

endurance, of tolerance and to help you cultivate your compassion,” I continued. “You must have vowed in your past life that you want to help sentient beings. Without a difficult sentient being to help, how can you become a Bodhisattva? So, because of your vow, you’re going to help this difficult sentient being, this little Bodhisattva.”



A Buddhist life is actually meaningful. It is filled with happiness, health, blessings and security.

Four Roadblocks of Life

What is life? Life means we have a living body. It also includes the process of life and the situations of life. The reality of life is one will experience insecurity and unhappiness at some time or another.

There are basically four major categories of roadblocks in life – the challenges of livelihood or careers, the

challenges of love, challenges of health and the last and most important one – the challenges of old age and dying.

Bodhisattva Vow

Moreover, some people may have vowed in their past life to help others with all the resources that they have, like money, health, intellectual power, and even their lives. Yet others may have made such a vow to dedicate themselves towards helping sentient beings not just for one life but throughout all lifetimes. These people are actually making a Bodhisattva vow and aspiring towards the Bodhi mind.

According to the perspective of Mahayana Buddhism, the Bodhisattva vow starts with ordinary people - people like us. When these people make such a vow, they are called a Bodhisattva with the initial aspiration to attain Buddhahood. Now, when they are reborn, some of them forget the vows made in their past lives, but their karmic force is so strong that they will continue to help others, and even suffer on behalf of all sentient beings in this life - such as sacrificing themselves in calamities.

One of my lay followers had a difficult childbirth. When the boy was born, she had problems caring for him as he was ill all the time, and bothered the family frequently with his crying and tantrums. If they hire a babysitter or nanny to look after the baby, he becomes very ill. “This child must be here to claim a debt that I owe him,” she lamented, “He’s actually a bodhisattva. Both of you are bodhisattvas,” I told her. “He’s here to help you practise the paramita of

The First Roadblock: Challenges of Livelihood

The very basic need for someone to live and survive is to eat. So if there is difficulty in livelihood, and we cannot satisfy such a need, there’s a problem. Is there anyone who dies from hunger in Singapore? I believe not. So in other words, Singapore is a paradise. Actually, the problem with unemployment is a general phenomenon universal to all countries in this world. If you can still keep your belly full even if you’re unemployed, you can volunteer for NGO (Non-governmental Organisation) work. Otherwise, try to find something you can devote yourself to. For example, in Taiwan we have unemployed people who collect trash and kitchen leftovers to turn them into fertilisers. One eventually became an owner of a fertiliser company from such collections.

The Second Roadblock: Challenges of Love

The second basic need is love. Once the need for food is satisfied, we will look to fulfilling the need to produce the

next generation and that has to do with love - the kind between males and females. But human feelings and emotions are extremely complex and delicate. Even if you put two singles together, it does not mean that they will hit it off naturally. The worst situation is when the person we love gets robbed away or stolen by a third party. Then, there is yet another problematic situation when one is passionate and adores the other while the other half is cold and passionless. It is also painful when two people who are very much in love are not allowed to get married because of parental objections.

I remember an old lady who does not like both her son-in-law and daughter-in-law. Even when both produce grandchildren, she still dislikes them. One day, she asked: "Master, what should I do? I want my daughter's children, I want my son's children but I don't want my son-in-law or daughter-in-law." I answered: "Well, you need to practise. You need to practise letting go, to be compassionate. A Buddhist is supposed to bring joy and happiness to other people and as a Buddhist, you need to learn to let go and help your son and daughter." The old lady took my advice and today she enjoys very harmonious family relations with them.

Love has to be established by both parties. A couple's relationship is such a close relationship that they interconnect. Thus, it should be managed, maintained and shared by both parties. It requires commitment by both sides. If only one party is concerned and puts in effort to maintain the relationship, it will not work. If there is no such interconnection between both of them, we cannot have the marriage relationship or what the Chinese called "ying yuan" (因缘) or karmic affinity.

The Third Roadblock: Challenges of Health

Now, let's talk about the challenges of health. When we talk about health, we refer to the body, environment and the mind. If our mind is healthy and not in a worrisome state, even if the body is ill or the environment is dirty and unhygienic, we can still be considered healthy. Now, the Chinese have a saying, "tong ku" (痛苦) or Pain and Suffering. Actually, pain does not necessarily bring about feelings of suffering and bitterness. For instance, a person can be very, very ill but mentally healthy. That is, he is still balanced and will not allow the disease to influence the quality of his life. But if the person is mentally-unbalanced and unhappy, even with a healthy body, one's mind will create problems for oneself and create problems for others around one.

So the teaching of the Buddha is also the teaching about adjustment of the mind. In Buddhism, we especially emphasise the adjustment of our mind and our fluctuations in emotions.

But before we can adjust our concepts, ideas or attitude, we need to acquire some knowledge and views about how



to deal with problems, and learn the methods that will help us transcend one's roadblocks of life after another.

The Fourth Roadblock: Challenges of Old Age & Death

Many fear death especially old people who are as old as I am. People are afraid because they don't know where they will go after death. They don't know what will happen when they die and then they don't know what will happen before they die, until they die. People are so uneasy about death that the Chinese avoid the number "four" as its pronunciation is similar to the word "die". I once saw a snake chasing after a frog. The frog tried very hard to escape from its predator but was unsuccessful. All of a sudden, it seems as if the frog realised that its efforts were futile, for it froze, stopped and waited for the snake to come. When the snake arrived, the frog crawled into the mouth of the snake. In the face of life and death, people who wish to die earlier because they believe they will get liberated earlier are just like the frog. Yet others will not recite the name of Amitabha Buddha and Ksitigarbha

Bodhisattva. They feel that reciting Amitabha Buddha's name reminds them of death, or is equivalent to death, and reciting Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's name means they will go to hell. They prefer to recite the name of Medicine Buddha because they believe Medicine Buddha will guarantee them health and longevity.

Actually the Buddha's teachings help us to gain two kinds of benefits. One, happiness in life - we will enjoy blessings, security, peace, joy and health. Second, liberation from the cycles of birth and death, and its vexations.

This is because if we realise and understand the teachings of the Buddha and believe in the law of cause and effect, we will not worry unnecessarily when we are confronted with any difficulties or dangers in life.

Once, the car I was in almost met with an accident. The others who were in the car screamed and shouted when our car was nearly hit by the other driver. After a while

If we apply the concepts and methods taught by the Buddha in our daily life, we would be free from troubles and vexations such as fear, worry, greed, anger and ignorance.

they turned around and noticed I was not scared, but calm. "Master, why weren't you afraid?" they asked. "What's the need?" I replied. "If we get hit, we get hit. If we don't, well see how fine we are now." I always tell people that while it is necessary to be cautious, it is unnecessary to worry and be afraid. It is destined that we will die one day on the very day we were born, so it is unnecessary to worry too much. If our time is not up, we won't die, so there's no need to worry.

Nevertheless, praying to Buddha or a Buddhist deity you have faith in is very useful and can help us to face our fear in times of danger or death. Chanting a Buddha's name calms our minds temporarily and makes us feel more secure. There's a saying in the Chan school that, "The mind is the Buddha, and the Buddha is the mind. If we can see the Buddha, we see our minds." And if we have the Buddha in our mind, in our heart, we will be together with the Buddha, and therefore we will have peace and security. There's also another saying that goes, "Everyday, we wake up together with the Buddha in the morning and we sleep with the Buddha when we go to bed at night." It means when we wake up, the Buddha within us wakes up together

with us, and when we retire for the night, we rest together with the Buddha. We are actually never separated from the Buddha, so it doesn't really matter if we recite the Buddha's name or not because the Buddhas are always with us. Knowing the Buddhas are always with us, we naturally have peace and a sense of security within us.

By understanding the Dharma of cause and effect and conditioned arising, we can experience being together with the Buddha. In the Agamas, there's a saying that goes, "If we can perceive conditioned arising, we perceive the Buddha." As we perceive the Buddha, we perceive the Dharma. So if we can really experience this, we will be in the presence of the Buddha. Conditioned arising refers to the fact that life arises through the twelve links of conditioned arising.

The Twelve Links of Conditioned Arising

Life started because of our fundamental ignorance. With fundamental ignorance, we commit actions that generate karmic force, that in turn gives us consciousness. With consciousness comes birth. One birth brings us to another, and then we are trapped in the samsaric cycles and continuous repetitions of birth and death.

So whenever we find ourselves unhappy or afflicted by worries or vexations, we have to remind ourselves that there is no need to get ourselves all jittery and anxious. What will happen, will happen in spite of our worries. But at the same time, we need to remember that we still have to be vigilant, to avoid unwanted things from happening. We want to be careful but not bogged down by worries. If we can do this, we are temporarily liberated from vexations and will be able to transcend the roadblocks of life. Each time we break through a roadblock, we are liberated. Thus, if we constantly transcend the roadblocks with wisdom, we are constantly breaking through life's problems and obstacles.

I have an example to illustrate this. Once, a lady came to me. Her doctor told her she had only two weeks to live as she was diagnosed to be in the last stage of cancer. She became so afraid that she died the next day. Now, did she die because of the illness or did she die because of fear? When people became very tense and stressed, they die more quickly. Yet another lady who had two to three months to live because of terminal illness took my advice to recite Amitabha Buddha's name. I also told her to visualise and imagine that she is in the company of Amitabha Buddha whenever she does her recitation, because Amitabha Buddha means infinite light and infinite longevity, hence she will always be protected within the brightness of this Buddha of longevity. And she's alive till this very day.



chant once, we attain its merits once. So if we constantly recite the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, we will never fall into the three lower realms, and will be able to help others and ourselves.

In addition, we should also learn about the teachings of the Buddha, and put the Buddha's

On Liberation

Likewise, we can recite the name of Amitabha Buddha to overcome other difficulties we face in life. Of course, our ultimate goal is to liberate ourselves from the endless cycle of births and deaths. Now, there are two possible situations of liberation. One, we never return to this world, never to experience birth and death again. Second, we return to this world because of our Bodhisattva vow to continue to help and deliver sentient beings, but we are liberated from the fear of birth and death and any worries. This kind of liberation is called the Mahayana liberation. The Chan school of liberation is the second kind of liberation in that we remain unperturbed by the environment or by different conditions of our body. This is the real liberation.

In Chan school, there is a saying: "To perceive one's true nature is to perceive the Buddha-nature". This saying means if one is able to perceive Emptiness based on the perception of conditioned arising, we will understand that whatever phenomenon, as long as it follows the workings of conditioned arising, is transient and will naturally perish. Thus, the self is nothing but the temporary existence of a combination of various causes and conditions. And since it is impermanent, there's no need to worry. Once we can understand this, we will be undisturbed by whatever happens to us and achieve liberation.

Practice is the key to liberation

Now, the entrance to the gate of Buddha is through taking the three refuges. According to the sutras, if we take refuge in the Buddha, we will not fall into hell. If we take refuge in the Dharma, we will not fall into the realm of ghosts. If we take refuge in the Sangha, we will not be reborn in the world of beasts. If we recite the three refuge-taking

teachings in practice, by utilising simple but practical ways, such as reciting the Buddha's name, reciting mantra or doing Chan meditation to adjust our body and mind to the disturbances in life.

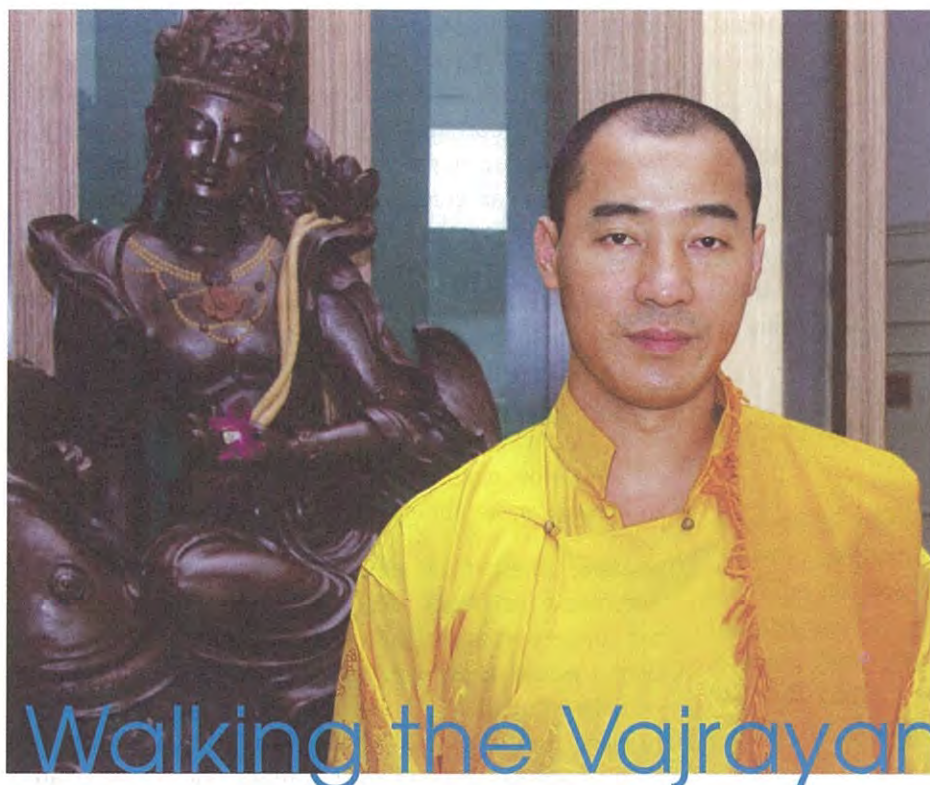
The Four Principles of Chan Meditation

The first principle is relaxation of the body and the mind. When the mind is totally relaxed, heightened awareness arises. This is the second principle. And then we experience our breathing – the third principle, followed by fourth principle of enjoying the experience.

So first, we relax the body and the mind when we are meditating. Next, we become aware, aware of our breathing, aware of the breath, going in and out of our nostrils. We experience our breathing fully and enjoy the experience. We practise by integrating these four principles in our sitting meditation and other activities such as walking, eating or drinking in our daily life.

For instance, when we eat, we eat with a relaxed body and mind that is also aware that we are taking a meal. When we are mindful and aware, we can actually experience ourselves having a meal, and finally enjoy the experience. It's the same with any other thing you do in life, be it drinking, walking, driving or working.

As long as we follow these four principles in our daily life, we will always be in a relaxed and clear state of mind. By experiencing what we are doing with full attention, we will live in the present moment to its fullest and be able to thoroughly enjoy whatever we are doing. Hence, we will stay in a clear, calm, relaxed and peaceful state of mind at all times. These are the principles of Chan meditation.



Khenpo Gyurme Sangay Wangdi, a Bhutanese lama, speaks to Esther Thien about The Nyingma school of Buddhism and of his life as a Buddhist teacher.

Walking the Vajrayana Path

Tibetan Buddhism can seem mystical to some. In this issue, *Awaken* gets up close and personal with Khenpo Gyurme to understand more about the world of Vajrayana Buddhism and his life as a Dharma teacher.

Awaken: What is the difference between Chinese Mahayana Buddhism and Vajrayana Buddhism?

Khenpo: Chinese Mahayana Buddhism and Vajrayana Buddhism are really very similar. Buddhist practitioners from both sectors emphasise a lot on compassion and the need to do Bodhicitta practice. The only difference is that Vajrayana Buddhism consists of very particular and specific practices involving a root guru.

Awaken: We understand there are 4 branches in Tibetan Buddhism - Nyingma, Gelug, Kagyu and Sakya. How different are they?

Khenpo: Actually, they are very similar. All schools follow the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. The Nyingma school is the oldest. The only difference is each branch has different lineage founders or gurus. Though there are slight differences in the practices taught by the various schools, all ultimately practise the essence of the Buddha's teachings.

Awaken: What is the difference between a Khenpo and Rinpoche? How does a lama (Vajrayana monk) become a Khenpo or a Rinpoche?

Khenpo: The title "Khenpo" is given to someone who has studied all Buddhist texts and sutras, usually somebody who holds a PhD in Buddhist Philosophy. Normally, the

abbots of the Nyingma, Kagyu and Sakya monasteries select their best and most qualified from the Lopen (Lecturer) group to be a Khenpo. In the Gelug school, such a person is called a "Geshe". In Tibetan language, "Rinpoche" means "Precious One". Though this title is often given to highly realised lamas and their future rebirths, a yogi can also be called a Rinpoche if he is a serious and good Dharma practitioner.

Awaken: Please describe a typical day for you as a Dharma teacher and lama.

Khenpo: As a lecturer in the monastic university - Ngagyur Nyingma institute in Namdroling, I wake up around 4 or 5am and retire at 11pm. During my waking hours, my day is packed with doing the practices of the Four Foundations (Ngondro) and the Great Perfection (Dzogchen), class preparation, teaching, conducting student discussions and holding discussion sessions with other Khenpos.

Awaken: Is it necessary for someone who is a follower of Tibetan Buddhism to learn and practise all the various rituals of his tradition?

Khenpo: Not necessary. Just concentrate on one that you are comfortable with and be diligent in your practice to purify your mind.

Awaken: What is the most effective kind of meditation? Is meditation a must for someone who wishes to be a lay practitioner?

Khenpo: Personally for me, I think it is the Dzogchen meditation. It is the highest meditation for the Nyingma school which allows you to recognise and understand the true nature of the mind. Yes, meditation is necessary for someone who is serious in his Dharma practice. Without meditation, one cannot become enlightened, especially for a follower of the Vajrayana tradition.

Awaken: Can you tell us more about the various practices of the Nyingma school.

Khenpo: It consists of preliminary practices of Ngondro (chanting, generation of Bodhicitta, mandala offering, Vajrasattva purification and dedication) and the profound practices of Dzogchen which represents the non-dual, or absolute ultimate teaching of pure and total intrinsic awareness. A person has to complete 100,000 times of each of the preliminary practices before he can start on the advanced practices of Dzogchen.

Awaken: What advice would you give to someone who wishes to cultivate compassion to be a more compassionate person?

Khenpo: First, you have to seek and search for good Dharma teachers and masters. Then follow and practise the teachings or methods as taught by these teachers. For example, the Six Paramitas and Bodhicitta, to help develop compassion and loving-kindness. Make an effort to change your mindset by putting yourself often in the shoes of another being, e.g. "I'm the insect, the insect is me."

Awaken: You studied under two very great masters, His Holiness Dungsay Thinley Norbu Rinpoche and His Holiness Pema Norbu Rinpoche. What are they like?

Khenpo: Both Holinesses are very learned and very compassionate. His Holiness Dungsay Thinley Norbu Rinpoche gives very clear and meaningful teachings. His speech is soft and smooth and he is an outstanding and brilliant Dzogchen practitioner. His Holiness Pema Norbu Rinpoche is the root guru whom I have 100% trust and confidence. He is my role model and I hope to be as compassionate as he is. He is very inspiring in the way he conducts himself and solves all problems through the Dharma way.

Awaken: Purification of the mind is very important in Buddhism, but the mind is also elusive and hard to understand. Could Khenpo give some advice on how to understand and work with the mind?

Khenpo: Put in effort to attend Dharma talks more actively to improve and progress in your knowledge. Practise as diligently as you can in a Buddhist method you are

comfortable with, so as to plant positive seeds and leave good imprints in your mindstream for your next life. It is easier to purify and work with the mind if you have accumulated good merits (positive karma) for yourself and have eliminated negative obscurations. Meeting a good teacher who can guide you well is also very important. It will make walking the Dharma path much easier. However, this also depends on the individual's karma. Thus, in this life, do as much good as you can to accumulate merits so that they help create the causes for you to meet good teachers and the continuation of your spiritual practice in your future lives.

Awaken: How would you advise someone who would like to find out more about Buddhism?

Khenpo: Whether one enters the gates of the Dharma or becomes a practitioner depends very much on one's karma, the connection and affinity with the teacher and the Triple Gem. I would advise him/her to attend Dharma talks given by different teachers, to ask questions, to investigate so as to eliminate their doubts as much as possible, and to instil right understanding and view. Through putting the Dharma into direct practice in daily life, one can find appropriate solution to any problems that one may experience.

Awaken: To a beginner, what is your most succinct way of describing Buddhism so as to attract him or her to learn and practise it?

Khenpo: There are many ways to attract one to learn and practise Buddhism. For me, I will usually check the individual's mental capacity and absorption level. Karmic connection between the teacher and the student is important too. This "attraction" can happen through a cause of an appropriate action or a teaching of the Dharma duly expressed by the kindness of the compassionate teacher.

Awaken: To advanced long-time Buddhist practitioners, how would you sum up the essence of the Buddha's teachings in ONE single line?

Khenpo: "Avoid Evil, Do Good and Purify the Mind - This sums up the teachings of all Buddhas." However, to truly avoid evil, do good and purify the mind, one must realise the true nature of the mind.

Khenpo Gyurme Sangay Wangdi studied and practised Buddhism of Nyingma school since the age of seven. At 11, he took a six year solitary retreat. Under the guidance of H.H. Dungsay Thinley Norbu Rinpoche and H.H. Pema Norbu Rinpoche, he received the entire transmission and initiations of the Dudjom Tesar lineage and Palyul lineage. In 2002, he was conferred the title of 'Khen Rinpoche' (a doctorate degree in Buddhist Philosophy) by His Holiness Pema Norbu Rinpoche. Since then, he has devoted his time to teaching in Ngagyur Nyingma Institute of India.

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Issue 4

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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 yaksas, 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 merit in doing so.
16. One will always be able to learn the Dharma, till one's wisdom and spiritual penetrations are fully grown and becomes a Buddha.

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Why Honesty Is Still The Best Policy

Shen Shi'an tells us why nothing beats being truthful and earnest.

Time flies. Another year has passed, and now it's that time of the year to take stock of the state of our spiritual life so far. Are we truly progressing by becoming kinder and wiser? Or are we actually regressing? Worse still, could we be going round in circles? Yes, it's resolution-making time again this new year, though any other time of the year is just as good a time.

Let us explore a deceptively simple way to better ourselves - through improved practice of truthfulness, which is a Buddhist precept of moral conduct. Now this might seem trivial, but is it really?

Let's hear what the Buddha has to say about truthfulness:

For the person who transgresses in one thing,
I tell you,
there is no evil deed that is not to be done.
Which one thing?
This: telling a deliberate lie.

The person who lies,
who transgress in this one thing,
transcending concern for the world beyond:
there's no evil he might not do.

This might seem shocking at first. Isn't a lie just a mere lie? How can it lead to great evil? As spiritual practitioners, we strive in our practice to realise the ultimate truth of the nature of life and death, which necessarily culminates in liberation through attaining Enlightenment.

The co-relation of truthfulness with progress on the path to the ultimate truth is more subtle than obvious. Stonepeace has these aphorisms to share on their connections -

- ~ The deliberate concealing of a small truth can be the beginning of great deceit.
- ~ One who treasures the truth equally treasures and upholds truthfulness.
- ~ A liar is never a seeker of the truth; just a twister of truths.
- ~ One's truthfulness determines one's worthiness of realising the truth.
- ~ If one lies about conventional matters, how can one expect to find the ultimate truth?

Sometimes, white lies are not as harmless as we think; they can be potentially destructive. Very often, the liars are never exposed, not even by their victims, for fear that they would be targeted and be harmed further still. Other times, those affected are so thoroughly disappointed and disgusted that they simply steer clear. However, the liars would have lost the trust of these people "forever", sometimes, without the liars "knowing" what went wrong between them. These victims might also quietly spread the truth that the liars are liars, so as to warn others, leading to distrust of the liars by more people.

Of course, this spreading of distrust is discouraged. But it tends to happen when some liars are found to be too cunning to be offended, and the victims wish to protect others. In such situations, the victims, even with the best of intentions, prefer not to confront the liars. Thus, liars should confess their lies, whether they are caught red-handed or not. For their own sake and for others, and to stop the compounding of great negative karma generated from the vicious cycle of distrust started by themselves, they should regret and confess. Only they alone can end this through sincere personal repentance and apology.

Lying to others is also lying to oneself... as one deludes oneself into believing one can "get away" with it. Even if not discovered by others, the repercussions of karma will catch up with one eventually, in one way or another. Lying is spiritually dangerous because it is perhaps the simplest way evil begins its growth into greater evil, as it can

deviously conceal all other evils. Even concealing the truth with the intention to deceive is considered a form of lying. Please don't be mistaken that lies must be untrue words that come from your mouth; lying can be done silently too, as illustrated in this adapted tale -

When the wolf first lurked nearby, he greedily thought it was largely harmless, that he could catch it for fame... before it suddenly seized a sheep and ran away.

When the wolf next appeared, he hatefully thought he ought to kill it by himself, as he picked up a stick... before it suddenly seized another sheep and ran away.

When the wolf appeared yet again, he deludedly thought it must have gotten its fill already, as he ignored it... before it suddenly seized another sheep and ran away.

Having lost three sheep in a row when he could have cried for help, he became known as "The Boy Who Did **Not** Cry Wolf" - and was as much distrusted as "The Boy Who Cried Wolf". As much as no one believes a liar, even when he is yelling the truth, no one believes the concealer of truth.

Not only should we not conceal truths beneficial to others' well-being, we should proactively share them too. The Buddha definitely wished His teachings to be shared with as many as possible, so as to benefit the masses. One would expect someone who shares with all the truth of the Dharma to first and foremost speak up for the truths of everyday life. For how can one be expected to deliver the ultimate truth if one cannot be truthful over the trivial? If so, let us hold high

the banner of truth and personal integrity, as we walk the path to Enlightenment! In the words of the Buddha:

If he does not speak up,
others know him not;
he is just a wise man mixed up with fools.
But if he speaks about and teaches
the immortal (timeless truth),
others will know him.
So let him light up the Dharma,
let him lift the sage's banner high.



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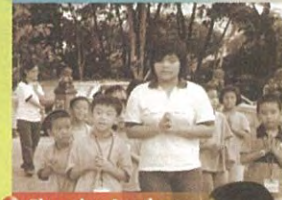
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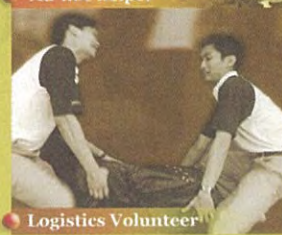
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Glenn Ong shows us what wonderful lessons a bag of old toys can teach us.

Recycling Happiness

It was my first overseas vacation for the year 2005. There to visit a friend, I decided to take time off to also visit 'Ban Rajchasima' - an orphanage cum boys' welfare home, that is situated some 300km from Bangkok. "The kids will be really happy if you can bring some food from the city and soft drinks during your visit," suggested a staff of the home over a phonecall. "They hardly have a chance to consume such food and drinks." So armed with bags of canned drinks and food for about 40 children aged four to 13, I reached the home just before lunch. The kids gathered slowly as we set out to distribute the food and drinks at a table. I noticed they queued the youngest in front without having to be as instructed by the adults. I still remember the first in line was a cute little child who wobbled unsteadily as he approached us.

As the food was handed out, each of them would clasp their little hands together (in the traditional Thai culture of greeting people) and say 'Korp Khun Kup' (Thank you) before receiving their gift. Everyone did so without having somebody telling them to. All save the cute toddler who was first in line, whom, I believe has not learnt to speak yet. All were so well-mannered. As I watched them tucking into the food and drinks we bought, a sense of joy and sadness pervaded my entire being. The genuine smiles and eyes sparkling of happiness from these sweet little faces as they were munching and drinking away gave me great joy, but at the same time, I was greatly saddened at the thought that more out there would probably never have the chance to savour such food and drinks, which, perhaps, some Singaporeans are sick of. At that instance, I felt so lucky that I was born in such a prosperous and stable country, and it hit me that the amount of money that we usually thought of as little can actually bring so much happiness into the lives of so many in less developed countries.

Immensely touched by this heart-warming experience, I decided to venture on another trip the following month, bringing 100 special packs of lunch that cost only S\$100 for the 90 odd kids of the home. But as the departure date drew nearer, I wondered if there was more I can do to bring more smiles, laughter and excitement into the lives of these children. It struck me that the kids might appreciate getting some toys. Remembering that KMSPKS has a recycling kiosk, I contacted the Volunteer Department of the temple, asking for some second-hand toys in mint condition to give to the children. Almost immediately, they helpfully arranged for me to collect two large boxes of stuffed toys cramped to the brim.



When I reached the orphanage, I was still worried as I set out to distribute the toys, that the kids might not like what I have brought. But I couldn't be more wrong! All toys were snapped up in minutes. In fact, except the older children, all wanted to have one. It tugged at my heartstrings to see the glistening disappointment in the eyes of kids who went away empty-handed. Seeing their excitement and happiness at receiving those toys that day strengthened my faith in what I was doing and I was more determined than ever to continue my missions as often as I could, whenever possible and wherever it is needed.



Returning home to Singapore, I quickly set out to plan my third trip. My original intent was to go back to the same place, but my friend whom had been my 'Logistic Commander' in Thailand had also become more enthusiastic about such trips and word spread. Soon, a village teacher contacted us and requested that we consider visiting the primary school that she is teaching in. The village primary school, named 'Ban Krap Pueang Yai' is in the village of 'Pid Mai', about 100km further up north of the province of Nakhon Rajchasisima. The teacher told us there are many poor village children attending school there.



We agreed. This time, with the kind efforts of our Thai friends and their relatives who helped us to cook the food personally, we prepared rice, noodles, curry, soup and a rare dessert treat for over 400 children for just S\$250! I also brought four boxes of toys, repacked into a black travelling suitcase, collected from KMSPKS recycling kiosk.

The lady teacher and her colleagues received us very warmly when we reached the school. As my friend had forgotten to inform her about the toys, the teacher was both surprised and delighted to discover that gifts of toys will be presented to the children. She revealed that the students come from poor families who rarely have "special" foods for meals, much less the money to buy toys. The school was so thankful for the donation of food and toys to their students that an ad-hoc ceremonial distribution of the toys to some lower primary children was conducted immediately. The school said that the toys will be consolidated for the 'Play Corner' they are going to set up, so that they can be shared and played by all.

When the kids had their fill, they broke up and formed various playgroups in the assembly hall. As I watched them deeply engrossed in playing, a veil of peaceful bliss descended on me. It is a sense of inner joy and serenity that no material possession or commodity can bring. "The happiness that these toys once brought to their original owners is now being 'recycled' thousands of miles away. All because of the fact that

many people in Singapore understood the concept of ‘recycling’ and practise it diligently,” I thought, when a little girl about seven years old caught my attention. She had a yo-yo in her hand and was fiddling with it, not really knowing what it was. I knelt down in front of her, held her hand, gently “looped” the string onto her finger and positioned the yo-yo in her palm. Though my gestures, she slowly got the hang of how to play with it.

Suddenly, she placed her hand on my cheek and stroked it gently, just like how a mother would caress her child. The feelings of love and gratitude oozed so strongly that I was stunned for a moment.

It was this very moment that I learnt the greatest lesson in my life. I realised unconditional love and gratitude transcend any language expression. With pure and innocent loving minds, fellow beings can co-exist very happily together transcending all cultural and language barriers.

As I left the school, I kept thinking what had transpired between the little girl and me. I was deeply grateful to her, for she had taught me an invaluable lesson on the essence of life – one which will last me a lifetime and make me a better person. I realise there are many material and immaterial things in life that we always take for granted. Our clean environment, air-conditioned



homes, the variety of foods that are easily available which we may even grow tired of eating at times; and the love, care and concern that our loved ones and friends shower us etc.

We really do have to be grateful for all these blessings in our lives, no matter how tiny they may seem, for there are really many people out there, somewhere across the oceans, who would yearn for a brief moment of what we have grown so accustomed to.

Having understood this, practising ‘recycling’ I guess would be second nature. Next time when you go on an overseas trip, why not put in a little more effort to bring joy and happiness to those people who are in need, all around the world. It doesn’t cost much and who knows, you may love it too!

If you would like to participate in compassionate giving and make a difference in somebody’s life either through volunteering or donating your recyclable household items, please contact KMSPKS Volunteer Department @ 6849 5357.



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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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"The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism."
-Albert Einstein

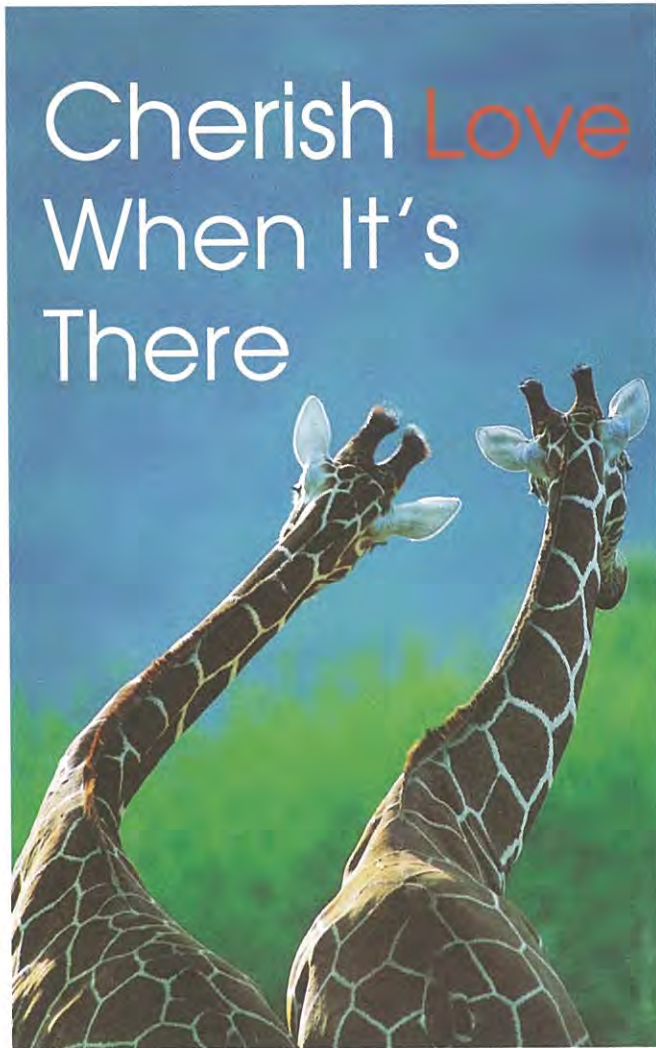
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By Esther Thien

But, eventually, I discovered his clandestine affair through a honey-sweet SMS sent by the lady on a fateful night. As much as I tried, I fought a losing battle to get him to end their relationship. In the end, he chose to leave the country to be with her.

I lost seven kilos in a month as I simply couldn't eat or sleep, experiencing only a tremendous, heavily weighted and ineradicable grief of heartache. Without warning, I was plunged into a bottomless chasm of despair and pain so dark and overwhelming that I wondered if I would ever recover from it.

Yet, recover I did. All because of the love of my family and friends. They held me up and supported me when my frail legs literally collapsed beneath me. Through this crisis, I thoroughly experienced and realised the transience of love and life, and how suffering can be.

All things and phenomena in this samsaric world, no matter what they are (even terrible ones), are impermanent. Everything operates on conditions that are ever-changing in response to a constantly fluctuating environment of events and our attitude. That's the nature of life, for nothing stays the same.

Always appreciate your loved ones and the little blessings you have in life, no matter how insignificant they may seem. Never take them for granted. Cherish the here and now, and that bond of affinity you still have with them in this very moment.

I'm thankful to my ex-fiance for teaching me such a precious lesson in life - especially on the harm of attachment. Though this experience gave me the worst shock of my life so far, it also awakened in me an understanding of how precious and fragile my human life is, and how beautiful and important each mother sentient being is. For the purity and kindness each and everyone are capable of, and their ability to experience pain and suffering, are the same everywhere.

Today, I try to live a life of kindness, gratitude and love in my every thought, word and deed. I know if I radiate loving-kindness and if my heart is pure, the world reverberates it manifold times back to me. I'm also more mindful of the karma I'm creating in this life, for I know the results of virtuous and non-virtuous deeds in body, speech and mind are inexorable.

To have learnt all that and be able to turn my mind towards the Dharma, I feel indeed truly blessed.

I had never been a very devoted Buddhist until the blustering winds of change bellowed in my direction in early 2003, changing my life forever.

I had this boyfriend, my childhood sweetheart, someone who had been with me since I was 17. We had a bittersweet 10-year relationship with many ups and downs. Over the years, we weathered different phases in life together - his NSman days, my university days and when I eventually started working at age 22. I even acted as his guarantor when he needed to borrow some loans from a finance company to pay for his part-time university studies.

As we often discussed about marriage, I always thought I would marry him one day, when we managed to save up enough money. But alas, Samsara is never always a bed of roses. Despite all that I have done for him, he left me for a Shanghainese lady 2 years older many a full moon later. She was a colleague whom he had met at a regional training workshop that all selected staff from Asia-pacific offices was to attend. He was deeply smitten with her and before long, started a long-distance affair of lengthy overseas calls, lovey-dovey SMSes and instant messaging with her, all the while trying to pull the wool over my eyes.

A Child's Reflections

By Shen Shi'an

As Mother's Day approaches this year, we offer these tributes. May we mindfully reflect upon them, as we recall the immeasurable significance our Mothers have in our lives...

Our Mother Guanyin

"Guanyin" is the Chinese name of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, who is known as the "One who regards the cries of THE world." It struck me that all these years, "My Mother is Guanyin Bodhisattva to me, by praying to Guanyin Bodhisattva for me"... for blessings such as good health, safety, success, well-being and seemingly every other thing. As a child and even now, she always does her best as "One who regards the cries in MY world!"

May I then, always be a Bodhisattva to her too. May I always be ready to hear her cries.

Our Mother Buddhas

In the Surangama Sutra's chapter about "Great Strength Bodhisattva's Perfect Penetration through Mindfulness of the Buddha", it was taught that: "The Buddhas of ten directions are compassionately mindful of living beings just as a Mother remembers her child. But if the child runs away, of what use is the Mother's concern? However, if the child remembers the Mother in the same way that the Mother remembers the child, then life after life, Mother and child will never be far apart. If living beings remember the Buddha and are mindful of the Buddha, they will certainly see the Buddha now and in the future. Being close to the Buddha, even without special assistance, they will awaken by themselves." How very touching! This has to be the most moving verse I had ever encountered in the scriptures!

May this move me to be ever mindful of the Buddhas' motherliness, and of my Mother's "Buddha-liness."

Our Bodhisattva Mothers

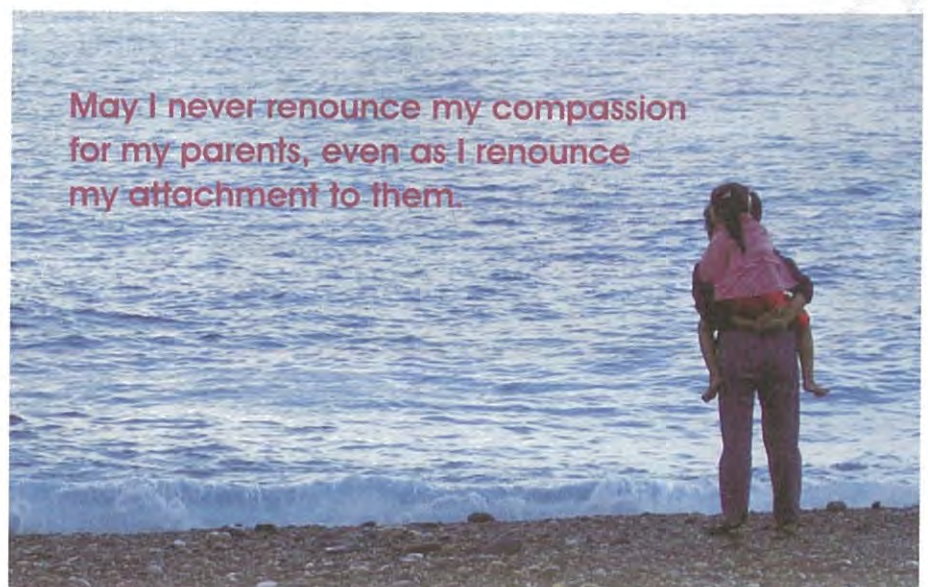
A good Bodhisattva Mother will let her toddler fall if necessary, on the path of learning to walk - lest the child

does not realise that sometimes one have to fall to understand the importance of perseverance to beat all odds. Sometimes not helping someone is offering the best help possible. Thank you my Mother, for extending a helping hand at times, and not during others. Thank you for everything!

May I never be resentful for your past misgivings, if they are truly misgivings at all.

Our First Bodhisattvas

The Buddha taught: "The parents are the highest beings in the world. They are the first teachers. They are worthy of being given offerings. Parents are by nature sympathetic to their children... If someone, who can truly afford, does not look after one's parents, who, their youth spent, have reached old age, such a person is an outcaste. Such neglect of old parents, is conducive to one's downfall... There are two types of people, one can never ever be grateful to enough. They are our mothers and fathers." Contrary to popular belief that monks and nuns are disengaged from their parents upon their renunciation of worldly life, the Buddha allows and expects monks and nuns to look after their parents - should they ever become unable to look after themselves in their sickness or old age. How very kind!



We hereby wish all precious Mothers, of the past, present and future, a very Happy Mother's Day!

The Little Girl's Dilemma

By Ng Pei Fuen

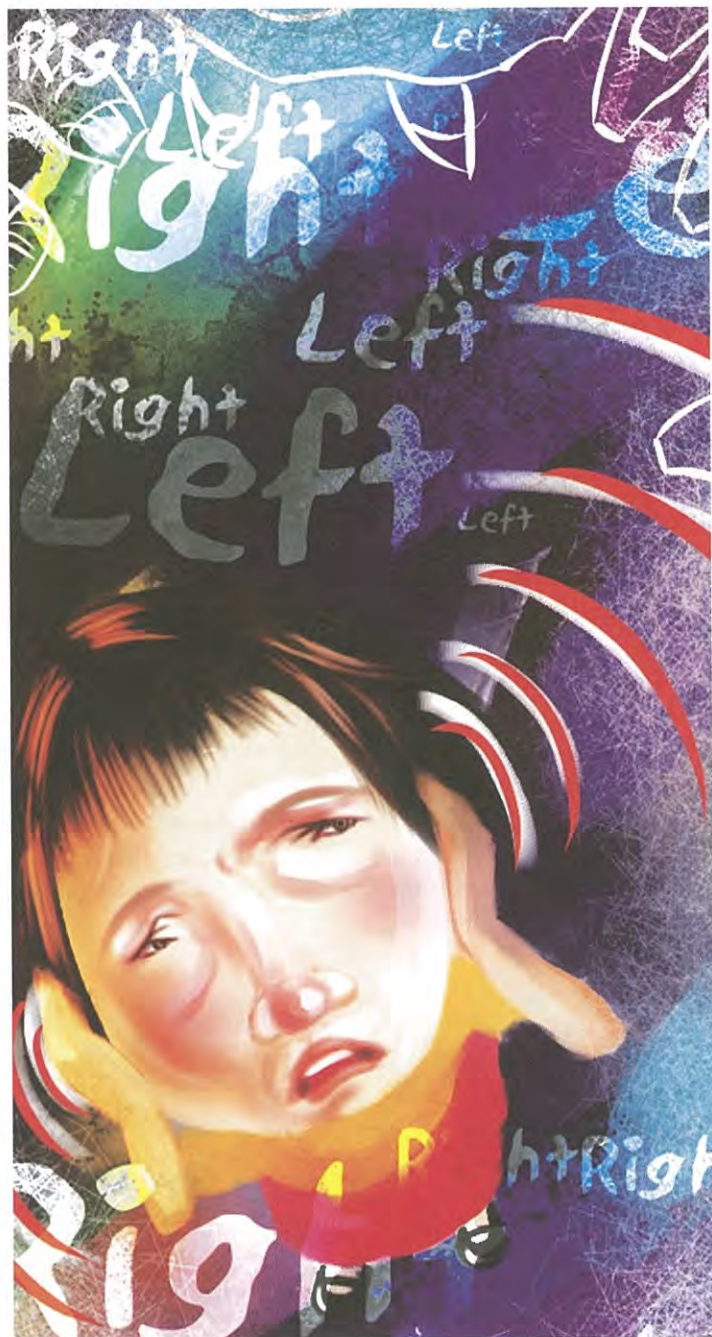


Illustration: Lee

Once there was a little girl. She always had two voices in her head. One told her to go left, the other told her to go right. Sometimes the left voice was louder, so she went left. At other times, the right voice was louder, so she went right.

One day, both voices were heard again at the same time. This time, both were equally loud. She did not know which to follow. After five minutes, they started screaming for her to take action. But the more they screamed, the more frustrated she became. She felt confused and afraid because she did not know which of the two voices was right. And they were torturing her every moment with language that became increasingly abusive.

Not able to bear the abuses, the little girl broke down in the middle of a road junction. Soon, people were coming up to her.

"What's wrong, my dear girl? Why are you crying?" They asked.

When she heard this concerned remark more than once, she replied tearfully: "I don't know whether I should turn left or right! And the voices are driving me crazy! Can you help me?"

Almost all at once, the concerned crowd chipped in their comments.

"Of course to the left! That will lead you to the police station so you can get yourself sent home safely," said one.

"No, to the right! That's where I stay. If she comes with me, I will take good care of me," uttered another.

"No no, the right path is so isolated. What if she gets hurt? The left path is safer. Especially if I'm around," came a third reply.

Slowly, the comments started getting personal. One guy started a shove, and got a push in return. In a manner of minutes, the crowd became a riot. Frightened out of her wits, the little girl tearfully crawled out from the fighting crowd.

When she was far enough from the crowd, she stood up slowly and rubbed her eyes. She felt so tired because she had been crying the whole day, and the crawling had hurt her knees. She saw a bench nearby and slowly made her way there. After a few minutes, she fell into a deep slumber. In her sleep, she felt safe. There were no voices there. She saw a bright stream of light in front of her. It looked so warm and inviting that she was naturally drawn to it. Floating on a fluffy cotton wool-like cloud beneath her, she headed

towards the light. She was filled with great bliss and joy in that tunnel of brightness. Coming to the end of the tunnel, she saw the hazy figures of a few people. Then it became more, like an assembly of sort. These people looked very different. Most of them had no hair, but there were also others at the peripheries of the semi-circle who had. The little girl did not understand why most of the bald people had a bare left shoulder. "Don't they get cold?" she wondered.

Still floating, she was brought to the front of the assembly and left gently on an empty seat. Interestingly, no one noticed her arrival. She looked around in amazement. She had never seen so many people in her entire life! There seemed to be more than a thousand people in this assembly. They all looked beyond her to a figure seating on a raised platform. She followed their gaze and put her palms together like she saw them doing.

The person on the platform was emitting a light so bright that she was dazzled. She was enthralled with whom she saw sitting on the platform. He was tall and had sharp features, which told her that he must be a very intelligent and capable being. His whole figure exuded so much love



that the little girl suddenly remembered her mother who loved her very much. She was moved to tears. But this time, these were tears of joy and gratitude. She did not know who this man was. But she knew that she liked him and perhaps he could tell her which way to go.

A gentle yet firm voice suddenly filled the entire space. The cool breeze suddenly swept past, waking the little girl with its chill. She felt sorely disappointed and upset

that she woke up before she could hear the answer. Hot tears rolled down her cheeks and she sobbed, her little figure trembling in the dusk. Down the road, an old man came by and cheerfully cried out to her: "Aren't you going home yet, little girl?" "But how do I know if I should turn left or right?" the little girl sulked and crossed her arms. A little grin broke out on the wrinkled, seasoned face of the elderly passer-by. He lean down to touch her arm and with the gentlest voice asked her: "But did you tell them where you want to go?"

"What do you mean where I want to go? It's either left or right!" replied the little girl. The old man took a more serious tone and squatted next to the little girl.

"You know, it's not about left or right all the time. It depends on where you want to go. After you decide the destination, you choose the path. The path sometimes turns left, and sometimes turns right. Sometimes you need to turn more than once on the path!"

The little girl looked up from her arms and met the eyes of the kind old man. She said nervously: "So I don't have to decide whether it's left or right at the onset?" Already she felt a huge burden heaved off from her chest. She touched her chest as if to find something there, but it was only a feeling. She felt better already.

"So where did you want to go?" The little girl felt her face warm up with embarrassment. "I... I think what I want is to buy myself some sweets."

The elderly man could not take it anymore. He burst out laughing and wiped away the tears from his eyes. He had not felt so much cheer in a long time. The little girl laughed along, relieved that her problem is coming to an end.

Still laughing, the old man took that little girl's hand and said: "Oh well, let's go and get those sweets and we'll send you right home." As the twosome walked down the road towards the junction where the riot had broken out, the little girl had no problem deciding which way to turn.

She knew only too well, that the candy uncle lived at the house to the left of the junction.

Seen, Heard & Read...

By Esther Thien & Shen Shi'an

Seen

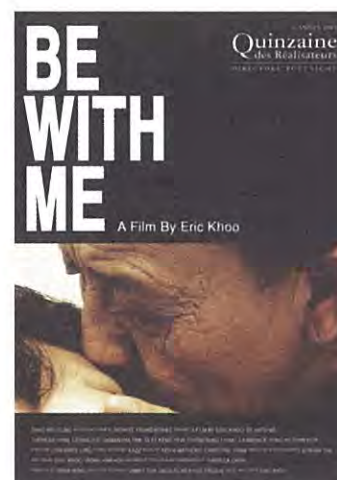
In this issue, we celebrate love in its many forms

Be With Me

Directed by: Eric Khoo

Starring: Theresa Chan, Ezann Lee, Samantha Tan, Lynn Poh

Be With Me, a minimalist film by Eric Khoo, is a tapestry of heartrending tales woven around human beings and their one common desire - to be with their loved ones. The protagonists in the movie are fictitious, save for one - Theresa Chan, a courageous deaf and blind woman whose life story inspired *Be With Me*. Capturing immense perspectives of the heart, it received a five-minute standing ovation during its premiere at the 37th Selection Directors' Fortnight's opening film at the 58th Cannes Film Festival. The movie depicts various relationships - kinship, friendship and love - and how they interweave through love, loss and hope. It speaks of how love and lovelessness makes and breaks us, and how love and loving makes life worth living. As Theresa said: "Love disappears only when you do not understand what it means." So let us all learn not to merely seek love, but to simply love - without expectations or regrets.



Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Directed by: Tim Burton

Starring: Johnny Depp

At first glance, this movie based on Roald Dahl book by the same name seems to be an ordinary children's classic. But if you look deeply, you will discover that it is not simply a fable for kids. It's really an ingeniously engineered moral tale which reconciles conflicts between parents and children, while extolling the virtues of family-bonding. Willy Wonka (played by Johnny Depp) is the eccentric chocolate genius who has lost faith in his parents and people in general. He decides to hold a lottery of sorts by including five golden tickets in his famous chocolates. The children who find them get an exclusive tour of his amazing secret factory. A final winner chosen among the five gets the unannounced special prize of inheriting his factory. The five kids who got initiated into the factory by Wonka reminds one vaguely of the first five disciples of the Buddha, who got the first "taste" of the Truth (in this case, the truth of how the factory worked). However, only a boy called Charlie proved worthy. The other four bratty kids present a spectrum of character flaws. We see how their parents played a part in nurturing their negative tendencies. This stresses the interdependent importance of both the children's willingness to learn from their mistakes and their parents' willingness to teach them about their mistakes. The movie also highlights the interconnecting and interdependent effects of our actions, when Charlie's father loses his simple but repetitive job of screwing on tubes of toothpaste to a machine that could do it faster. The production rate had to be increased as more kids had tooth problems from eating too much chocolate - in the hope of winning the golden tickets! Eventually, Charlie's father becomes the repairman of the machine that replaced him!



Transform your romantic love, cultivate compassion and take the Buddha as your guide

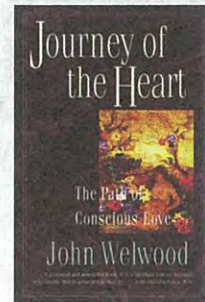
Read

Journey of the Heart:

The Path of Conscious Love

By John Welwood

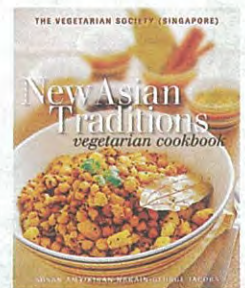
Ever wondered how you can use the difficulties you face in relationships as opportunities to expand your sense of who you are and deepen your capacity to connect with others? If you do, you are looking at the path of conscious love. This is a powerful new approach that uses intimate relationship as a path to personal and spiritual discovery. This book makes a great Valentine's Day gift for the couple who wishes to grow together spiritually. Selling S\$21.50 at Awareness Place.



New Asian Traditions Vegetarian Cookbook

By The Vegetarian Society (Singapore)

It is said that abstaining from meat can allow one's compassion to grow and make one a kinder person. So this cookbook is a must-have for all home kitchens, not just vegetarian households. The heart of the book can be summed up in two words: Passion and Compassion. Read it for its 66 kitchen-tested recipes, chefs' tips, food facts and myths, inspirational life stories, celebrity vegetarians and vegetarians' health Q & As. Get this highly entertaining and enlightening book from Awareness Place.



Stories from Buddhist Lands

Stories the Buddha Told

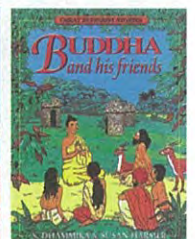
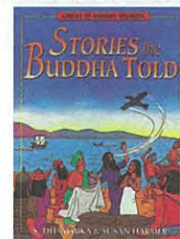
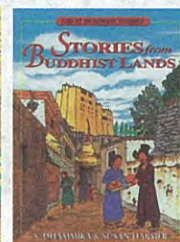
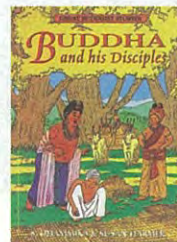
Buddha and his Disciples

Buddha and his Friends

Told by S. Dhammika

Illustrated by Susan Harmer

If your child is curious about how the Buddha was like in his previous lives, or how he handled various situations with his disciples and friends, don't miss these four richly illustrated books. Told in simple language and animated comic drawing, they bring Buddhist tales and stories about the Buddha to life. Let your little ones learn and understand about the Dharma in an interesting and easy way. Available for sale at Awareness Place.



Heard

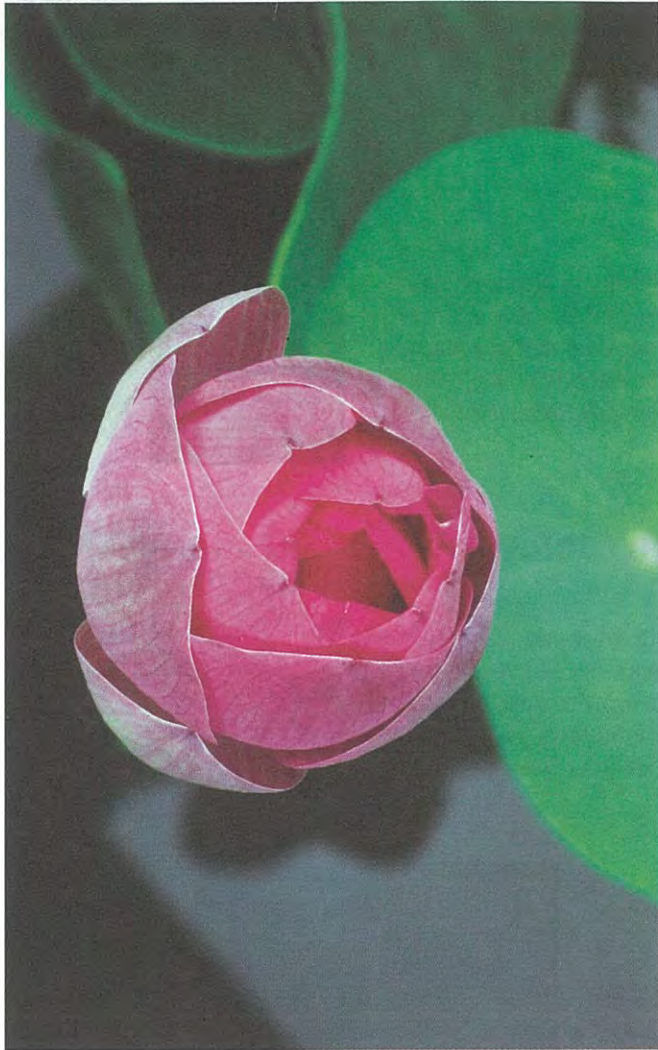
Balmy music to soften the heart and relax the mind



From the Yellow Room

Produced by Yiruma

Produced by Korea's most popular and best-loved romance musician, this music album contains 14 intoxicating and romantic piano tracks from the Korean movie "Love Letter". Guaranteed to relax your mind and captivate your heart, it is just the right collection of music to get you in the mood for love this Valentine's Day. Costs S\$17.00 at Awareness Place.



Photography: John Woo Wee Kuan

All beings own their deeds,
inherit their deeds,
originate from their deeds,
are tied to their deeds;
their deeds are their refuge.
As their deeds are base or noble,
so will be their lives.

- *Cula Kamma Vibhanga Sutta*

People deal too much with the negative,
with what is wrong.
Why not try and see positive things,
to just touch those things
and make them bloom?

- *Thich Nhat Hanh*

I'm like a fallen leaf on the surface of the water,
flowing forward, flowing away.
Suddenly stopping, suddenly spinning.
Sometimes waves arise, submerging it.
Sometimes it is calm, but still it flows on.
Why is it like that?
Not only does the fallen leaf not understand,
the one like the fallen leaf does not understand.
Some insights are realised in the moment,
some upon hindsight.
Everything about me changes within limitlessly complex
causes and conditions.
Causes and conditions are that real,
yet that unfathomable!

- *Venerable Yinshun (1906 - 2005)*

To be angry is to let others' mistakes punish yourself.
To forgive others is to be good to yourself.

- *Master Cheng Yen*

Death is a temporary end
of a temporary phenomenon (life).
Everyone dies, but no one is dead.

- *Buddhist Saying*

Do everything with a mind that lets go. Do not expect
any praise or reward. If you let go a little, you will
have a little peace. If you let go a lot, you will have
a lot of peace. If you let go completely, you will know
complete peace and freedom. Your struggles with
the world will have come to an end.

- *Ajahn Chah*

If you want others to be happy, practise compassion.
If you want to be happy, practise compassion.

- *His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama*

Agamas: Generic term applied to a collection of traditional doctrines and precepts; also means the home or collecting-place of the law or truth; the peerless law; the ultimate absolute truth. The sutras of Theravada are referred to at times as the Agamas.

Amitabha (Amida, Amita, Amitayus): Amitabha is the most commonly used name for the Buddha of Infinite Light and Infinite Life. A transhistorical Buddha venerated by all Mahayana schools particularly, Pure Land. Presides over the Western Pure Land (Land of Ultimate Bliss), where anyone can be reborn through utterly sincere recitation of His name, particularly at the time of death.

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

Attachment: In the Four Noble truths, Buddha Shakyamuni taught that attachment to self is the root cause of suffering: From craving [attachment] springs grief, from craving springs fear; For him who is wholly free from craving, there is no grief, much less fear (Dhammapada). For the seasoned practitioner, even the Dharma must not become an attachment.

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'.

Conditioned Arising: states that all phenomena arise depending upon a number of casual factors. In other word, a phenomenon exists in condition that the other exist; it has in condition that others have; it extinguishes in condition that others extinguish; it has not in condition that others have not. For existence, there are twelve links in the chain: • Ignorance is the condition for karmic activity; • Karmic activity is the condition for consciousness; • Consciousness is the condition for the name and form; • Name and form is the condition for the six sense organs; • Six sense organs are the condition for contact; • Contact is the condition for feeling; • Feeling is the condition for emotional love/craving; • Emotional love/craving is the condition for grasping; • Grasping is the condition for existing; • Existing is the condition for birth; • Birth is the condition for old age and death; and so on.

Dana: The practice of giving, of generosity.

Dedication of merits: Sharing one's own merits and virtues with others.

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.

Guanyin: Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva; the Bodhisattva who personifies the perfect Compassion of all Buddhas, who hears and heeds the cries of the world.

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.

Mahayana: The dominant Buddhist tradition of East Asia that emphasises on the Bodhisattva ideal.

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.

Paramita: Refers to the six practices, the perfection of which ferries one beyond the sea of suffering and mortality to Nirvana.

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.

Repentance: The recognition of misgivings and the resolution to rectify and never repeat them.

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.

Vajrayana: Tibetan school of Buddhism.

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

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

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@kmspk.org or send them to:

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Singapore 574117

Please include your full name and personal particulars



Matters of the Heart

Friends, I know nothing which
is as intractable as an untamed heart.
The untamed heart is indeed intractable.
Friends, I know nothing which is
as tractable as a tamed heart.
The tamed heart is indeed tractable.

Friends, I know nothing which
tends towards loss as does an untamed heart.
Indeed, the untamed heart tends towards loss.
Friends, I know nothing which
tends towards growth as does a tamed heart.
Indeed, the tamed heart tends towards growth.

Friends, I know nothing which
brings suffering as does
an untamed, uncontrolled, unattended,
and unrestrained heart.
Such a heart brings suffering.
Friends, I know nothing which brings joy
as does a tamed, controlled, attended,
and restrained heart.
Such a heart brings joy.

- *The Buddha (Anguttara Nikaya)*
Translated by Gil Fronsda