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Like returning empty-handed from an island of precious gems,
it is meaningless to ignore the sacred Dharma
after having obtained a human body. - Tibetan teacher Gampopa

It is every Buddhist's ultimate goal to attain Enlightenment, for we believe all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature. However, liberation is most achievable only in a precious human rebirth. It is called precious because it presents one the unique possibilities to free oneself from the cycle of rebirth.

Your human life is all the more precious if:

1. You have your organs intact and complete. 2. You have not committed the 5 heinous crimes - killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing a Arhat, wounding a Buddha and creating a schism in the Sangha 3. You hold no views opposite to the Triple Gem. 4. You are not crazy. 5. You live in a country or a place where Dharma exists. 6. You do not live in a barbarian country. 7. You live in a time when Dharma is available. 8. You have access to Dharma teachers, centres and other practitioners. 9. You have access to people who appreciate and help practitioners.

In view of the above, we have so much to be grateful about.

Regardless of the hardships and negative experiences we may have in our lives, every hurdle we pass only makes us stronger and spurs us to practise harder. Every suffering that we are able to transform into an enlightening experience only puts us a step further on our path.

May is a season of gratitude. We have Vesak Day, Mother's Day and various other auspicious days for us to say our thanks. In fact, we shouldn't just show our gratitude only during this period, we should be grateful each and every day of our lives. (Find out why on page 46.)

May all bask in the blessings of gratitude.

May all always remember and be mindful of the kindness and support given by all we know – The Triple Gem, our parents, our teachers, Mother Earth, our siblings and friends, co-workers and our enemies.

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

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.



With even a little intuitive wisdom
we will be able to see clearly
the ways of the world.
We will come to understand
that everything in the world is our teacher.

- *Venerable Ajahn Chah*

When Lord Buddha spoke about suffering,
he wasn't simply referring to superficial problems
like illness and injury,
but the fact that the dissatisfied nature of the
mind itself is suffering.

No matter how much of something you get,
it never satisfies your desire for better or more.
This unceasing desire is suffering;
its nature is emotional frustration.

- *Lama Yeshe*

"As I am, so are others;
as others are, so am I."
Having thus identified self and others,
harm no one
nor have them harmed.

- *The Buddha (Sutta Nipata 705)*

By amending our mistakes,
we get wisdom.
By defending our faults,
we betray an unsound mind.

- *Venerable Hui Neng, The Sixth Patriarch of Chan*

Suttas are not meant to be 'sacred scriptures' that tell
us what to believe.

One should read them,
listen to them,
think about them,
contemplate them, and
investigate the present reality,
the present experience with them.

Then, and only then,
can one insightfully know the truth beyond words.

- *Venerable Sumedho*

When there is hallucination,
there is the truth,
by recognising it as hallucination.

Where there is suffering,
there is peace and bliss,
by letting go and
experiencing it for numberless suffering sentient beings.
Always think of how others are kind and precious.
Treat them as you would like to be treated.

- *Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

When we feel love and kindness towards others, it not
only makes others feel loved and cared for, but it helps
us also to develop inner happiness and peace.

- *His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama*

The essence of Dharma Practice
isn't our external performance
but our internal motivation.

- *Venerable Thubten Chodron*

Is There a Need to Pray to the Deceased?

Q: My parents had passed away for more than 10 years and their ashes are kept in a crematorium. They could have taken rebirth long ago. Is there a need to pray to them during "Cheng Meng" or any other day of the year?

– Chwee Yuan

A: It is part of Chinese custom for one to pay respect to deceased parents as this act of remembrance is an expression of filial piety and gratitude (饮水思源). The actual visiting and praying to deceased parents during "Cheng Meng" is not for the purpose of burning paper effigies so they may receive them in their afterlife.

Ultimately, it is the sincerity of the children that counts when visiting. Although they could have taken rebirth long ago, praying to them during "Cheng Meng" or any other day of the year with a heart of gratitude will enable them to be benefited through the dedication of merits.

From the Buddhist perspective, it is important for a Buddhist to recognise the fourfold embodiments of our blessings – Our parents, our country, all sentient beings and The Triple Gem. They embody all the blessings in our lives. We should always be grateful to these fourfold embodiment of our blessings, and be mindful of our need to repay their kindness.

To repay kindness of our deceased parents, we can dedicate the merits of our practice to them – such as taking threefold refuge, prostrating and making offering to the Triple Gem, chanting, supporting the production of sutras, Dharma books, CDs and Buddha images, animal liberation etc.

Even though, they may have taken rebirth, our dedication would still provide the condition for the



seeds of virtuous deeds they did in the past to ripen, and allow them to experience the beneficial effects and happiness.

– Ven Chuan Xian

Q: Can a Buddhist instruct his family members to throw his ashes into the sea upon his death?

– Chwee Yuan

A: It is alright from the Buddhist perspective to have one's ashes dispersed in the sea. At the end of the day, the impermanent body is born due to a combination of causes and conditions. It is inherently empty of a true existence, and so we should not be too attached to it. However, throwing one's ashes into the sea should only be done provided the family of the deceased is supportive of his wish. There should be consensus in the family to prevent family discord and conflict from arising.

– Ven Chuan Xian

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

KMSPKS Commemorates Late Venerable Hong Choon with Museum and Ceremony

Singapore - More than 1,200 devotees, local and overseas Buddhist leaders and VIPs attended an inaugural ceremony at Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery on 3rd March. Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, his wife and Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon also graced the solemn and grand affair.

Themed "Gratitude - Connecting Lives" by the present abbot, Venerable Sik Kwang Sheng, the event which commemorates the 100th anniversary of the birth of late Venerable Seck Hong Choon, reminded all Dharma disciples to always hold a heart of gratitude for the kindness given by those around us, and the blessings we enjoy in life.

In gratitude and memory of the late Venerable, the monastery also launched a museum showcasing his relics and belongings, which include precious collections of scriptures. Venerable Hong Choon, KMSPKS's second abbot from 1947



to 1990, was responsible for developing the monastery, from just two simple shrine halls to magnificent architectural monuments spanning the size of ten football fields.

Remembered fondly by many as the "compassionate master", Venerable Hong Choon made great contributions to the Buddhist community and society, and was a strong, propelling advocator of world peace and religious harmony. These issues were also addressed by Mr Goh during the ceremony.

Speaking at the event, Mr Goh said Buddhist and other religious organisations play a useful role in Singapore's progress by contributing to social causes and supporting national efforts to promote racial and religious harmony. In the event of a terrorist attack, religious leaders can play an important part to calm the situation and help restore confidence, he added.

Venerable Kwang Sheng says the monastery will continue its efforts to promote inter-religious harmony, and welcome all races and religions to take a free tour, visit the museum and learn about its history.



Visit the museum on every Sunday, and the 1st, 15th and 27th of the lunar month. Located on the 3rd level of Venerable Hong Choon Memorial Hall, it is open to the public from 10am to 3pm.

Groups, families, and organisations with more than 10 persons who are interested in a free temple tour, please call 6849 5300 or email publicaffairs@kmspks.org for enquiries.

Scientific Progress is Needed, Says Dalai Lama

India - His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama said that scientific progress was needed, along with religion, philosophy and spirituality, if the world were to progress and prosper.

Chairing a programme 'Dialogue Between Indian Philosophical Traditions' in February in Varanasi, India, the Dalai Lama

gave this address which also focused on the various aspects of Buddhism in India.

Commenting on the scientific revolutions in the world, he said, science was still in its infancy despite claims of adequate scientific development across the world.

He then continued to pronounce the importance of knowledge and science and stated that science and knowledge were being expanded not only in India but throughout the world in an infinite manner. "No society and nation could attain progress by disassociating itself from the pace of science and knowledge."

But he also said world peace and happiness were possible only when human beings co-existed with love and affection.

The tradition of holding thorough discussions of Buddhist ideology in practice should carry on to foster an environment of fraternity, peace and love amongst humans, he added.



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书香室, 共沾法益, 尽在悟言中...

A person with short brown hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, is sitting on the ground in a field. They are looking towards a sunset or sunrise over a body of water. The sky is a mix of blue and orange. There are some vertical light streaks on the left side of the image, possibly from a video or a digital effect.

Vegetarian Shark Fin Soup 一品素鱼翅



Photography: Clarence Lee

Ingredients

1/2 bowl mocked shark fin - soak to soften.
 4 pcs dried chinese mushroom - soak to soften, season with sugar, steam for 8mins and shred.
 A bit of hairy fungus - wash away sands, separate and soak in water.
 1 pc black fungus - soak to soften and shred.
 40gm vermicelli - soak and cut into 3 to 5cm in length.
 1 tin needle mushroom - drain away water.
 40gm carrot - peel and shred.
 A bit of ginger root - peel and shred.
 1 stalk coriander leaves - cut into small pieces for garnish.

Gravy Ingredients

1 tbsp vegetarian oyster sauce, 1 tbsp starch, 1 tsp light soya sauce, 1 tsp mushroom stock, 2 tbsp cooking oil, a bit black vinegar and pepper (add last), a bit sugar, 5 bowl vegetable broth

Making of Vegetable Broth

Bamboo sugar cane 20cm, corn 1 pc, turnip 1/2 pc, soya beans 100gm, honey dates 1 pc. Wash ingredients, cook with 8 bowls of water for 1 hour and it is ready.

Method

1. Heat wok. Pour in 2 spoonful of oil and stir-fry ginger; add in other shredded ingredients and stir-fry again.
2. Pour in vegetable broth, bring to boil and add in the rest of the ingredients. Thicken with starch.
3. Pour in vinegar, stir well, add coriander leaves and pepper before serving.

用料

半碗素鱼翅 - 浸水泡软备用
 4朵香菇 - 浸软、加糖微腌后蒸8分钟后切丝
 少许发菜 - 冲洗沙粒, 分散, 浸水
 1朵黑木耳 - 泡软后切丝
 40克粉丝 - 泡软后切成3至5cm
 1罐金针菇 - 滤干水分备用
 40克红萝卜 - 去皮切丝
 一小段姜 - 去皮切丝
 1棵芫荽 - 切碎, 供装饰用

调味

素食蚝油1汤匙、太白粉1茶匙、酱油1茶匙、麻油1茶匙、香菇精1茶匙、食油2汤匙、食盐、糖少许, 上汤5碗, 黑醋、胡椒粉少许(后下)

上汤的制作方法

竹蔗20cm长1支, 玉蜀黍1支, 小沙葛(俗称芒光)半个, 黄豆100克, 密枣1枚。把材料洗净, 与8碗清水合煮1小时即成。

做法

1. 热锅倒入油约2汤匙, 翻炒姜丝。加入其他切丝料继续翻炒。
2. 注入上汤煮沸, 加入其他材料, 滚后勾芡。
3. 加入黑醋调匀, 洒上胡椒粉及芫荽即成。

Vegetarian foods can be appetising and nutritious. In this issue, savour the mouth-watering taste of "Shark Fin" Soup and Tofu Fruit Salad.

Fruit Salad with Tofu 水果豆腐沙律



Ingredients

1 pc dragon fruit - skinned and diced into 12mm cube
 1 pc green apple - cored and diced into 12mm cube
 1 pc ya-li, chinese white pear - skinned, cored and diced into 12mm cube
 1 pc cucumber - cored and diced into 12mm cube
 1 pc carrot - skinned, cooked and diced into 12mm cube
 1 box soft tofu in packet - cut into 2

Salad Sauce Ingredients

5 tbsp lemon juice, 2 tbsp crushed peanuts, 1 tbsp chilli sauce, 2 tbsp light soya sauce, 1 tbsp sesame oil, mix salad sauce ingredients well.

Method

1. Deep fry chinese tofu with fresh cooking oil. Place the tofu in the serving plate.
3. Put the diced fruits, cucumber and carrot into a mixing bowl. Pour in the sauce and mix well.
4. Pour the mixed salad on the tofu and it is ready to be served.

用料

1个龙珠果 - 去皮、切成12mm 小块
 1个青苹果 - 去心、切成12mm 小块
 1个鸭梨 - 去皮、去心、切成12mm 小块
 1条黄瓜 - 去心、切成12mm 小块
 1条红萝卜 - 去皮、煮熟、切成12mm 小块
 1盒装的软豆腐 - 切成2块

酱汁调味料

柠檬汁5汤匙, 花生碎2汤匙, 辣椒酱1汤匙, 酱油2汤匙, 麻油1汤匙, 把酱料全部调匀备用

做法

1. 豆腐, 在清洁的油中炸香。将豆腐补置于盘中。
2. 将切好的瓜果放入大碗内, 加入酱汁调匀。
3. 把碗内的沙律铺在豆腐上即成。

For more information about Vegetarian Cooking Class, please e-mail thhauw@kmspks or call 6849 5332 to 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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Are you worried?

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

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

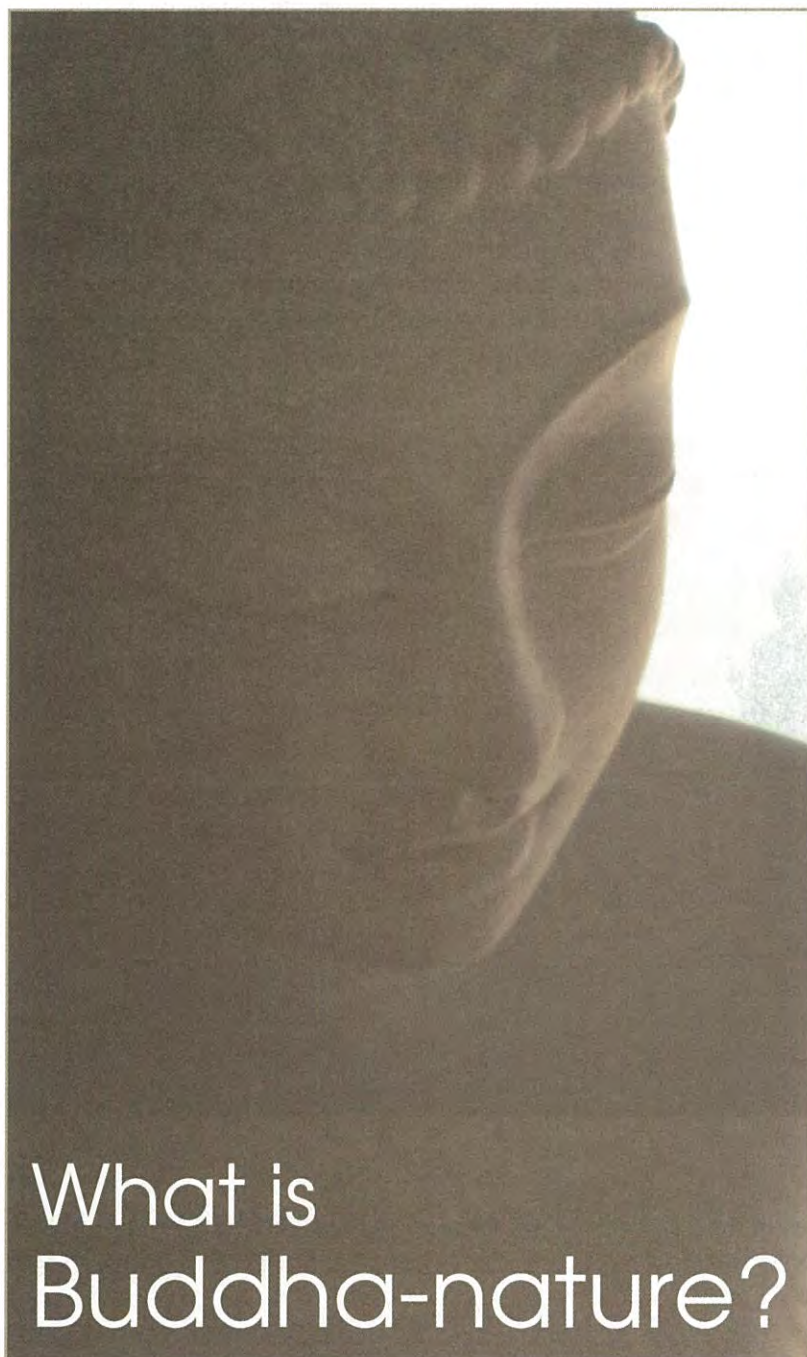
Or how you can **overcome your problems, difficulties** and the challenges you face in life?

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

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May the Dharma bring light to your life!



What is Buddha-nature?

Ven Dr Chang Qing explains what Buddha-nature in Buddhism means.

In Buddhism, the ultimate goal is to attain liberation and become a Buddha. The topic of “Buddha-nature” deals with whether one could become a Buddha, and is hence considered one of the most crucial concepts in Buddhism.

Most Buddhists think that as all beings possess Buddha-nature, all will naturally become a Buddha one day as long as they have faith in this phenomenon. It is only until we have attended courses and talks on Dharma, and have acquired some basic Dharma knowledge, would we understand the real meaning of “Buddha-nature”.

The real meaning of Buddha-nature

In Buddhism, “Buddha-nature” actually means that all beings harbour the potential for enlightenment. It is a rather complicated concept to appreciate.

Although there are numerous explanations, I am not discussing it at length here. Instead, I will give only a brief account, highlighting some of the issues that may be overlooked.

According to Liu Ming-Wood, the term “Buddha-nature” (佛性) is the Chinese translation of a number of closely related Sanskrit terms, notably “Buddhadhatu”

(Buddha-realm), “Buddhagotra” (Buddha-lineage), “Buddhagarbha” (Buddha-embryo) and “Tathagata-garbha” (Tathagata-embryo), and its connotation varies with the context. (*Madhyamaka Thought in China*, p.160)

The *Ta-pan-nieh-p’an Ching* proclaimed that all beings universally possess “Buddha-nature”. Nonetheless, it does not translate that having “Buddha-nature” will definitely make one a Buddha. This view should be considered from the perspective of “nature of effect” (果性). However, we should treat the term “nature” (性) as a “direct cause” (正因) and thereby explain the “Buddha-nature” from this perspective.

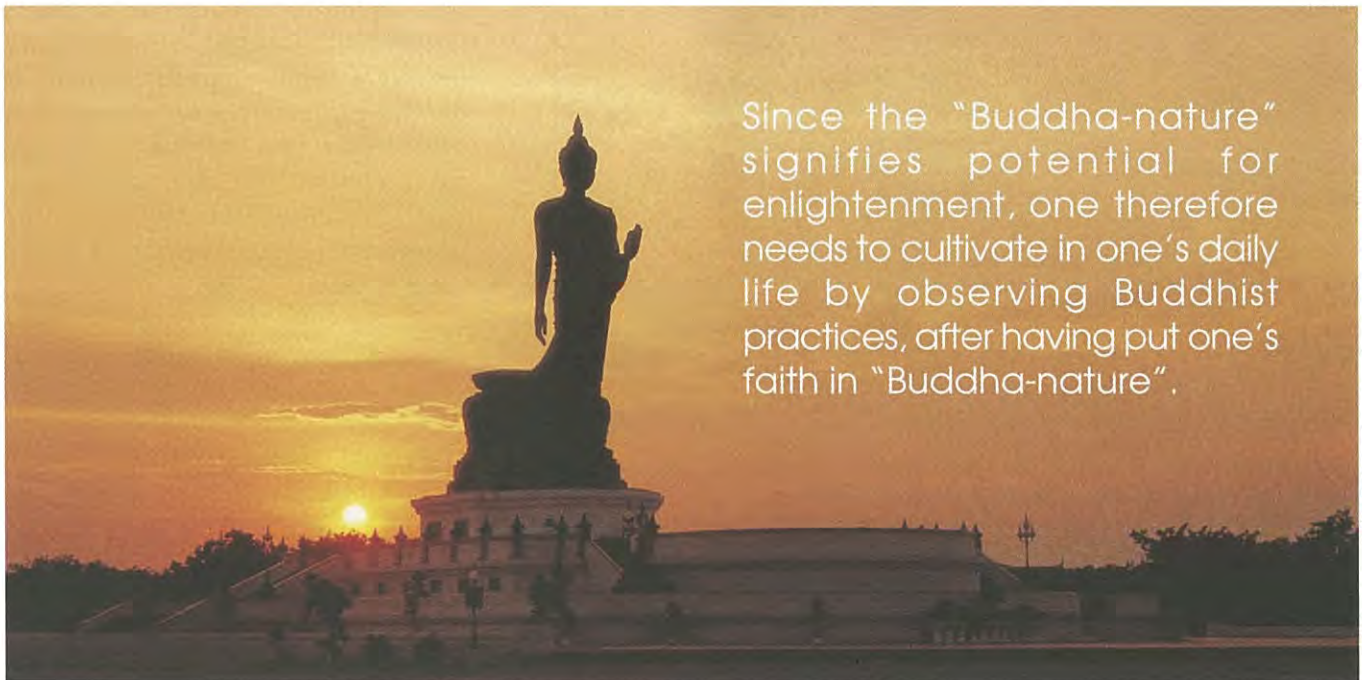
capacity for enlightenment – all sentient beings have the potential to realise Buddhahood. Generally speaking, based on the *Nieh-p'an-ching's* explanation, the term “Buddha-nature” seems rather mythical. Nevertheless, this is not as hopeless as it sounds. According to William G. Grasmick,

These mythic conceptions are of great value in human life; they provide a shared framework for making intellectual and moral sense of nearly every aspect of reality, whether it be occurrences in the natural world, events of human history, or the more personal happenings of an individual's life. (See his article “Buddha Nature as Myth” in the book *Buddha Nature* ed. Paul J. Griffiths and John P. Keenan, p65).

If some has not heard of this teaching,
He may, out of cowardice or sense of inferiority
Blame himself for all sorts of failings
So that the aspiration for enlightenment never arises
in him.

(Taisho 31, 840c13-16)

Hence, it is remarkable to note that one could derive real power from the thought that one possesses “Buddha-nature”. Thus it is mindful to say, one should put one's faith in “Buddha-nature” and then cultivate it through following Buddhist practices in order to bring forth wisdom and thereby progress towards the ultimate goal of enlightenment. In this regard,



Since the “Buddha-nature” signifies potential for enlightenment, one therefore needs to cultivate in one's daily life by observing Buddhist practices, after having put one's faith in “Buddha-nature”.

He also claimed that the real significance of the statement, “all beings universally possess Buddha-nature” lies in the sense that the proclamation can convey hope and confidence that are so desperately needed by people who have lost the notion of a meaningful life. (ibid., p71)

In other words, this statement imparts confidence and faith to sentient beings. This is not only important but also a requirement for religion.

It is vital to note that one must have faith in “Buddha-nature” from the very beginning so as to build up one's confidence and to progress forward.

For example, the Ratnagotravibhaga responded to the question, “Why has the Buddha declared that the essence of Buddha (Buddhadhatu) ‘exists’ in every living being?” (Taisho 31, 840b29-c1) by saying:

“Buddha-nature” actually encompasses the ideas of “faith” (信) and “wisdom” (智).

These two elements are the cores of Buddhism. In other words, the implication of “Buddha-nature” is in accord with the theory of Buddhism. In my opinion, “faith” can also be considered as “principle” (理) and “wisdom” can also be treated as “practice” (行). Buddhism is not only underpinned by faith, but also by wisdom. Similarly, “Buddha-nature” not only focuses on faith, but also enables one to practise the Dharma through imparting confidence in order that one may generate wisdom.

In the *Ta-chéng Hsüan-lun*, Chi-tsang writes :

If one knows wisdom, that means one also knows “Buddha-nature”. If one knows “Buddha-nature”, that

means one also knows Nirvana. (Taisho 45, 37c9-10).

According to my understanding, Chi-tsang implied that wisdom arises from “Buddha-nature” through one’s cultivation, once one has realised that there is the capacity for enlightenment. Likewise, one will comprehend Nirvana once he has understood the concept of “Buddha-nature” and has then generated wisdom through practising the Dharma towards liberation — Nirvana. Although Chi-tsang did not mention faith in this context, as far as I am concerned, “Buddha-nature” also encompasses faith in order that one may cultivate wisdom further. Hence, the relationship between all these concepts could be outlined as below:

Faith → Buddha-nature → Wisdom → Nirvana

All in all, the correct concept of “Buddha-nature” is that it depends on one’s need to cultivate wisdom besides having faith. It is worth noting that even if one possesses “Buddha-nature”, that does not mean that one will definitely become a Buddha without practising Dharma. Hence “Buddha-nature” is soteriological rather than theoretical.

Finally, let us achieve faith in “Buddha-nature” as the first step and then nurture wisdom in order to proceed towards the final goal – Buddhahood. Otherwise, with faith but without wisdom one can never be enlightened.

Certainly, to practise Buddhism in this mundane world is never an easy task. We may encounter many hurdles that will impede us in our practice.

However, by having “Buddha-nature” together with persistent and conscientious Dharma practice, we will feel happier and more contented in our present life, and eventually accomplish the goal of enlightenment.

Ven Dr Chang Qing is a Singaporean Chinese monk with a PhD in Buddhist Studies from Bristol University (UK). He was the Spiritual Advisor of Nanyang Technological University Buddhist Society (NTUBS) for 2 years, and had published an English Buddhism book titled *The Two Truths In Chinese Buddhism*. Presently, he teaches English and Chinese Dharma classes at The Mahaprajna Buddhist Society.

Why I like Buddhism?

I was inspired to walk the Buddhist path by my late mother, Teo Gek Keng. Her death affected my elder brother, sister, me and our families very greatly as my parents had slogged their entire lives to ensure that we grow up to be upright people with good careers and happy families. When she was alive, I did not heed her call to become a Buddhist, and it was after her death, that I started reading up about Buddhism and understanding what it really is about, and how karma can affect one’s rebirth etc. I pray that my mother will have a good rebirth, and my friends and loved ones will join me on the path. May all be enlightened one day.

– Chua Koon Teck, 40, Business Development Director

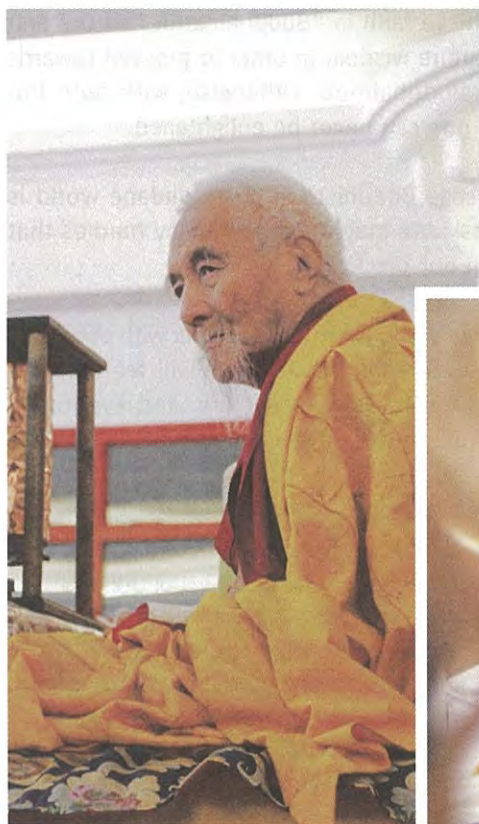
What attracts me to Buddhism is the idea of ehi-passiko; come, see and you’ll know. It is about experiencing it for yourself, rather than just believing blindly. Nirvana, which is what Buddhists aim to achieve, is not something we can attain by just worshipping the Buddha, but through our own efforts. It is something you have to work hard for, something you have to experience for yourself, and only yourself. That is the beauty I see in Buddhism.

– Michelle Ang, 18, Ngee Ann Poly Student

I was raised an Anglican and was diligent in studying the Bible and practising what was preached to me. Over time, however, I found it difficult to reconcile the concept of a loving, merciful God, with one who would despatch to eternal hell, those who did accept his son as their personal saviour. Consequently, I began reading about other religions in my late teens. Buddhism struck a chord with me. It advocates investigative thought, not unquestioning belief. The Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path make perfect sense. The tenets of compassion and wisdom, if applied fully to every aspect of daily living lead to awareness, mindfulness, peace of heart and mind, harmony within and without oneself, and eventually, liberation. For me, the practice of Buddhist philosophy is the only Path that renders psychological transformation in one’s mind that ultimately serves to benefit both oneself and other sentient beings.

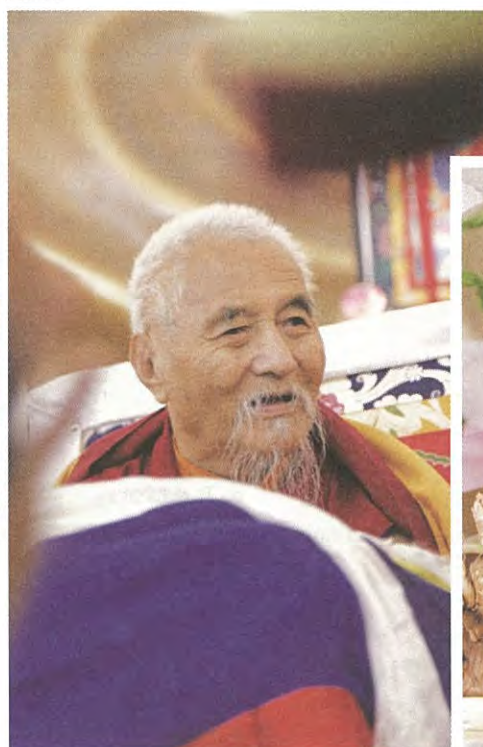
– Dorothy Chan, 40s, Director of Tongren Therapy





The Compassion of Mani

His Eminence Drubwang Konchok Norbu Rinpoche tells Esther Thien why it is so important to chant the six-syllable mantra at all times.



Photography: H C Heng



Generating feelings of compassion and Bodhicitta is very important in Buddhist practice. Kudos to you if you are already on the path and are doing some kind of practice to benefit all sentient beings. But if you are not, read what His Eminence Drubwang Rinpoche, a highly realised lama, has to say on how to generate the mind of compassion and Bodhicitta through the practice of the six-syllable mantra, OM MANI PADME HUM.

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

Rinpoche: Compassion can be generated if you have the understanding that the individual is going through some difficulties and is suffering. When we recite the six-syllable mantra, we also make a wish that the recitation of the mantra can benefit the sick person or the individual who is going through the difficulties. In order to have compassion for other beings, we have to understand and realise that they are suffering and feel in our hearts their pain and suffering.

Awaken: If a person finds it hard to tame his mind while reciting the mani mantra but would still very much like to do the guanyin practice, what advice would you give to the person.



Rinpoche: Mani is everything. If you want to recognise what is the Mani, it is the Buddha. Mani is the enlightenment. If you keep reciting the six-syllable mantra, gradually you can remove any kind of obscurations and defilements you have in your mind. Reciting the six-syllable mantra can actually tame your mind. There is no doubt about it. Just recite everyday and generate loving-kindness while reciting.

Awaken: May Rinpoche please summarise the teachings of the six-syllable mantra which you are advocating?

Rinpoche: If you elaborate the six-syllable mantra, it is symbolic or representative of the six realms of existence. Within this six-realms of existence, they have their own categorisation and classification. However, if you summarise that, it is the six-syllable mantra, and if you still want to further summarise the Mani mantra, that would be the Buddha.

Awaken: May Rinpoche please tell us what a beginner can do to develop great faith in the mantra?

Rinpoche: Having a human life shows that one has gained great merits in the past. Not just that, being born as a human in a Buddhist community and society shows the

immense good karma and merits one has accumulated in one's past life. Reciting the Mani mantra can help us obtain a better rebirth - a human life, yet again, in a Buddhist environment. Those who did not gain merits in this life will be reborn in the lower realms after death where they are not able to encounter the teachings of the Buddha. If we keep reciting the mantra, there is no doubt that it will enable us to have a better rebirth.

Awaken: If someone chants the mantra while doing something else at the same time, would it still be effective?

Rinpoche: Yes, there is great benefit as well. Whenever you have time, recite the mantra. No matter what you are doing, even when you walk, travel, work, drive, recite and don't disconnect yourself from the Mani. There will be great benefit. Instead of spending leisure time talking, it would be more beneficial and fruitful to chant OM MANI PADME HUM.

Awaken: How can we liberate ourselves from Samsara?

Rinpoche: It is very simple. Just chant the six-syllable mantra. OM MANI PADME HUM also called Mani is the practice which can be easily done by ordinary beings like ourselves. It is a practice that is simple and straightforward. Those who hear, practise or recite the Mani can benefit by obtaining rebirth in the higher realms, and even be liberated from the cycle of existence. Every sentient being has the potential to become a Buddha but their mindstream is obscured by defilements. But when their obscurations are removed, they are Buddhas. There is no doubt about this. We recite the six-syllable mantra to remove these defilements.

Awaken: Rinpoche is a great advocator of vegetarianism. Why so? How does it relate to the Mani practice?

Rinpoche: It is related to the practice of compassion. When you eat meat, you are taking the life of another sentient being. This creates negative karma in which you will have the experience the consequences by being reborn in the lower realms of hell or animal. You have to use nine lifetimes to repay for the killing and taking away of one life.

About His Eminence Druwang Konchok Norbu Rinpoche

Praised by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama as a very powerful and accomplished practitioner, H.E. Druwang Rinpoche has over 30 years of meditation retreat experiences. He is an accomplished practitioner with high realisation and a retreat master of Mahamudra. Especially appointed by H.H the Dalai Lama to propagate the Guanyin Practice to the whole world for the benefit of all mother sentient beings, he has personally completed 12 rounds of 100 million times of the Six-Syllable Mantra to date. And has successfully led numerous 100 Million Mani recitation retreats in Nepal and India. In Singapore, he has led the completion of 100 Million Mani recitation at Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery from 2001 to 2006.

The Healing Power of Gratitude

Professor Cheng Chen Huang, a renowned Buddhist scholar and practitioner, tells us why having a heart of gratitude is so important to us.



Gratitude is a healing balm to our problems in daily life and cyclic existence. Those who have gratitude will transcend mental defilements and eventually attain Nirvana. Gratitude is emphasised in Chinese Buddhism because of its healing power and enlightening factor. A Buddhist, actually every man on the street, should practise gratitude at the beginning, the middle and the end of his life.

Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the US and a political philosopher once said: “Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal. Nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong attitude.” Likewise, gratitude is the mental attitude that will help us achieve our ultimate goal in life, happiness. Gratitude symbolises love, compassion, warmth, gentleness, softness, tolerance, peace, zeal, charity, and wisdom in one’s mind and heart. It showers happiness to us right here, right now and is the right mental attitude to achieve our goal of Nirvana.

Why Gratitude?

The practice of gratitude is based on the principle of interdependent origination. All phenomena, including all sentient beings and all non-sentient things, exist interdependently.

Sentient beings depend on non-sentient things, and vice versa. Human beings depend on other sentient beings and

non-sentient things, and vice versa. Among human beings, Chinese depend on non-Chinese, and vice versa. Among the Chinese origins, those in Singapore depend on others outside Singapore, and vice versa. Among the Chinese origins in Singapore, the Wu clan, for example, depends on the non-Wu clans, and vice versa. Among the Wu clan, family A depends on family B, and vice versa. Among family A, parents depend on children, and vice versa. Between the parents, father depends on mother, and vice versa. In the body of the parent or child, the head depends on the rest of the bodily organs, and vice versa. In the head itself, the skin depends on other cells and minute parts, and vice versa. This process goes on infinitely.

Nobody and nothing can exist apart or be isolated from others. Therefore, we have to practise gratitude to everyone, including our enemy, and everything, including adverse situations. When we bear gratitude in mind, our mind is peaceful. When the mind is at peace and full of wisdom, we will be able to solve all our problems.

Gratitude to Whom and What?

*“Nothing is good or bad, but our thinking makes it so.”
~ Shakespeare*

Anything which feeds our ego is considered as good, and anything which threatens it is considered bad. But in reality, all that is perceived good is not necessary good, and all that is deemed bad is not necessary bad. That is why we have to show our gratitude to all sentient

beings and non-sentient things, no matter whether they are good or bad.

We have to show our gratitude to those who have helped or been kind to us. Such as our parents who gave birth to us, and brought us up; our teachers who taught us and our siblings who supported us. Even our relatives, friends, classmates, acquaintances, compatriots, and other good people produced and/or provided physical and spiritual foods to sustain our life. Without them, how can we survive?

Not just that, we also have to show our gratitude to those who are hostile towards us. If we claim that we are 'good' people, it is because that there are people judged as 'bad'. When we have gratitude, we cease our grudges, and fully utilise our energy in a positive direction to guide the so-called 'bad' people back to normal. When 'bad' people become 'good', the whole society, including ourselves, will benefit.

We have to show our gratitude to favourable situations because they make us happy, and give us the energy to move towards the unknown future. Likewise, we have to show our gratitude to unfavourable situations because they present us with crucial tests and make us even stronger than before. When we hold a heart of gratitude, the challenges become opportunities of learning and growth.



In Buddhist scriptures, four kinds of people in particular are mentioned to whom we have to pay our gratitude: our parents, our king (nowadays, the leaders of our country, community or organisation), all sentient beings and Mother Earth, and the Triple Gem.

They are called the fields of grace, merits or blessings. When we show our gratitude to them, we are planting seeds in the fields, and, one day sooner or later, we will reap the harvest of grace, merits, or blessings. The more seeds we plant with pure minds, the more pure harvest we will reap.

How to Practise Gratitude

Gratitude is a panacea to panic. However, we have to practise gratitude before we can internalise it in order to emit the waves of gratitude in all directions at all times.

This is how we practise gratitude within ourselves. First, we may take the posture of sitting meditation or any other relaxed position. Then, we take smooth, long in-breaths and out-breaths for a while. When our mind has calmed down, we start the journey.

We can assume one organ as a person to show gratitude, and other organs as the objects of gratitude. For example, first we imagine our eyes as saying "thank you" to our ears, nose, mouth, teeth, tongue, head, neck, shoulders, arms, waist, fingers, chest, abdomen, hips, legs, heart, lungs, kidney, intestine, and so on. When we are doing this practice, we have to be very clear in our visualisation of saying "thank you" and receiving "thank you". We practise in this way seeing in our mind's eye one organ by one organ from our crown to our sole as the person to say "thank you".

Next, we envision ourselves as the person to say "thank you" to our parents, teachers, brothers, sisters, relatives, friends, colleagues, compatriots, neutral persons, enemies, human beings, other animals, other sentient beings, non-sentient things, and so on in this Earth, other planets, the whole universe of the past, the present, and the future.

We can also picture in our mind inviting two persons, two organisations or two countries that are at odds with each other with one saying "thank you" to the other. Finally, we end this meditation by visualising that every sentient being or non-sentient thing is saying "thank you" to one other. The whole cosmos is filled with the orchestra of "thank you" and feelings of appreciation and gratefulness.

May is a month of gratitude. There is Vesak Day, Mother's Day, and many other auspicious days to say "thank you". Let's practise gratitude each and every day of our lives to perfect our path of the Dharma!

Professor Cheng is a well-known Buddhist scholar who has conducted numerous Dharma Talks, Workshops and Meditation Retreats in Taiwan, America and Southeast Asia. Renowned for his Buddhist philosophies and practices, he has published more than 500 news articles and 20 books on Buddhism. Some of these include the translated Chinese versions such as Tibetan Book of Living and Dying by H.H. Dalai Lama, Consciousness at Crossroads: Anapanasati; Zen in the Martial Arts; Beginning to See and Mind Like Fire Unbound.



Silvia Fiscalini-Wenger, a trained hospice caregiver tells Awaken of the things she has learnt from caring for the dying and those afflicted with AIDS.

By Esther Thien

Awaken: You see so much pain and suffering in the course of your work. How do you deal with that?

Silvia: I work with my mind, do some mind training and cultivation on impermanence, karma and emptiness. I try to be mindful and aware of each passing moment, and to eliminate the mental defilements like

She looks like your typical Caucasian. Some may even mistake her for a dowdy housewife on a first impression. But Silvia Fiscalini-Wenger is no ordinary lady.

She was a consultant and advisor for Aids patients and their families at the Aids-Foundation of Berne, Switzerland. Armed with her professional nursing training and a heart of pure compassion, she educated and trained healthcare professionals in the care of Aids-afflicted people. She also holds a Masters of Arts from Naropa University, and is the founder and director of the Berner Hospice in Switzerland. Today, Silvia works as a movement therapist and helps the dying and their loved ones through the FPMT Centre in Switzerland.

A Buddhist practitioner who co-directed Land of Medicine Buddha and teaches Buddhism at the FPMT centre, Silvia tells us of the insights she has gathered from her work.

Awaken: Tell us of the insights you have acquired through your work?

Silvia: You will understand that many people all around you are suffering in various degrees, suffering from illnesses, from obesity, from the fear of dying etc. **But running away from suffering or refusing to acknowledge them squarely do not help. Because a point in time will come when one will suffer.** For me, this suffering comes when my mum was dying. Fortunately I have my Dharma practice and the support of my friends to fall back on. Through caring for the dying and those afflicted with severe diseases, I learnt to have respect of others' suffering. It is also through my work that I wish to develop great compassion to help others as much as I can.

attachment, anger etc that arise in me on a day-to-day basis. I also remind myself to do my personal practice and go for spiritual retreats. I'm very grateful for the chance to learn about the Dharma and encounter the many spiritual teachers I have met. I'm truly thankful. **It is good to have some form of refuge because spirituality completes a person.**

Awaken: How should a lay Buddhist practise in his daily life?

Silvia: Practise some form of appreciation and gratitude everyday. Be kind, gentle, warm and open-hearted instead of being close-minded. Give rise to the thought to benefit others and not to harm others in all that you do. Make such an aspiration and wish every morning upon waking up. You won't feel lonely and depressed when you realise that everyone is alike in wanting happiness and not pain and suffering. Rejoice in your merits if you have done good, and reflect on your mistakes. Make the wish to do better the next day. Appreciate that you have the opportunity to learn the Dharma, live and be with others, and to cultivate the mind.

Awaken: What last words would you say to someone who is dying from a terminal illness?

Silvia: Firstly, assure her. Tell her you love her. Tell her it is okay to go, and not to be afraid to go with the light. We should look at people in a pure way. They are more than just their bodies and their sufferings. We should also see the kindness and the good nature that are abundant in them. We should see their Buddha-nature, the innate quality and human potential in them. Sometimes, I say something beautiful to make them feel good and sometimes I just don't say anything but just be with them.

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ISSUE 5

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2. One will be protected by devas, and be unharmed by natural and man-made disasters.
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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 merits in doing so.
16. One will always be able to learn the Dharma, till one's wisdom and spiritual penetrations are fully grown and becomes a Buddha.

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Why Buddhists Do What They Do On Vesak Day



Photography: John Woo Wee Kuan

Bowing: Prostration with one's palms together before an image of the Buddha is not idol-worshipping. It is an expression of deep reverence. It acknowledges that the Buddha has attained perfect and supreme Enlightenment. Such an act helps one to overcome egoistic feelings, to become more ready to learn from the Buddha.

Circumambulation: Circumambulation is the act of going round an object of veneration, such as a stupa (a monumental structure which houses holy relics of the Buddha or renowned Sangha masters), a Bodhi tree (the tree the Buddha sat under for shelter when He attained

Enlightenment) or a Buddha image for three or more times as a gesture of respect. It is done by walking meditatively in a clockwise direction, keeping one's right towards the object of veneration.

Offerings: Making offerings is an act of devotion which expresses appreciation and great respect to the Triple Gem. Each item of offering has its significance. Below are some of them:

Light: To remind us of the illuminating brightness of Wisdom which dispels the darkness of Ignorance on the path towards Enlightenment. This urges us to seek the light of ultimate Wisdom.

Flowers: To remind us of impermanence of all things. Like the flowers which soon become withered, faded and scentless, our very lives too will pass away. This urges us to treasure every moment of our life while not becoming attached to it.

Incense: To symbolise the virtue and purifying effect of wholesome conduct. This urges us to refrain all that is evil and to cultivate all that is good.

Water: To symbolise Purity, Clarity and Calmness. This urges us to cultivate our body, speech and Mind to attain these qualities.

Fruits: To symbolise the fruits of spiritual attainment, especially the ultimate fruit of Enlightenment, which is the goal of all Buddhists. This

Bathing Baby Prince Siddhartha

Ceremonial bathing of an image of the prince in a basin of perfumed water strewn with flowers symbolises the purification of one's unwholesome deeds with wholesome deeds.

Do You Know...

urges us to strive towards the Enlightenment for one and all. They also remind us of the teaching of karma, or cause-and-effect.

Chanting: A melodious way of reading to reflect upon the Buddha's teachings, and help one develop concentration and a peaceful state of mind. Buddhists commonly chant mantras, scriptures and names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Light Transference Ceremony: In this ceremony, devotees hold a lighted candle after sunset, as they pave around the perimeter of a temple, holy object or monument in walking meditation as they chant mantras or the Buddha's name in praise of Him.

The ceremony represents the passing of the light of Wisdom (sharing of the Truth) to every direction of the world to dispel the darkness of Ignorance. On a personal level, it has the significance of lighting up one's inner lamp of Wisdom.

The burning of the candle reminds us of the transience of all conditioned things, including our lives. Mindfulness is practised in not letting the flame be extinguished. This is symbolic of the constant guarding of the mind against negative factors detrimental to the spiritual life. In the ceremony, it is most inspiring to see a single flame illuminate a sea of darkness into an ocean of lights that bring brightness to each another.

Three Steps One Bow Ceremony: In this ceremony, devotees usually line up before sunrise to meditatively circumambulate the perimeter of the temple, bowing once every three steps, while chanting mantras or the name of the Buddha in praise of Him. Upon every prostration, the Buddha can be visualised standing upon one's open palms to receive the Buddha. The open palms symbolise lotuses that denote blossoming of purity.

Every prostration is thus the paying of respect to the Buddha (or the countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas). This practice helps purify the mind, humble the ego and lessen obstacles along the spiritual path as one repents past misdeeds and aspires towards spiritual improvement. With mindfulness of one's body, speech and mind during the practice, concentration and calmness can be attained.

As the ceremony is long, it reminds one of the long and difficult journey towards Enlightenment. But it also serves to remind us that as long as we are determined, all difficulties can be overcome. Perseverance in completing the practice despite its difficulties also helps to strengthen our faith in the Buddha and His Teachings to lead us towards Enlightenment. The break of dawn at the end of the ceremony represents the light of Wisdom dispelling the darkness of Ignorance as one advances on the journey towards Enlightenment.

Adapted from Be A Lamp Upon Yourself published by Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery

Why I like Buddhism?

Buddhism provides a balanced and rational approach towards morality, questions on existence and our place in the universe. It encourages enquiries and investigation rather than blind faith. Through Buddhism I've also gotten a much deeper understanding of where happiness and unhappiness comes from. More than that, the Buddha has also provided us a path towards attaining greater peace and happiness. Through learning the Dharma and the practice of meditation, I've experienced the highest happiness, joy, peace and a sense of well-being in my life. That experience has provided me a guideline, a new approach towards dealing with all the ups and downs of life. Buddhism is indeed a precious gem.

- Tok Meng Haw, 31, Engineer

Buddha-Dharma is beyond science, philosophy and religion. As it is all about truths of living and the entire universe, Buddhism is always relevant and applicable to all, regardless of time, locality and one's faith. It is probably the only set of teachings that is able to bring sustainable peace and harmony to today's world.

- Zenon Teh, 46, Executive Director

Buddhism resonates with this age of reason. It teaches the use of self-examination over undiscerning acceptance, wisdom over blind faith. Such mentality motivates the cultivation of responsibility. The knowledge that your fate is not simply a collision of random factors or predestined and unchangeable, but instead, shaped by your continuous actions, is extremely empowering and liberating.

- Dana Lim, 28, Programme Executive



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When the Mind is Pure, the Land is Pure



It is a common Buddhist custom to greet each other with a cheery "Amitufo!", which happens to be the Chinese name of perhaps the most famous Buddha in Mahayana Buddhism, the central figure of the Pure Land tradition. But what is it really about? Let Shen Shi'an demystify it for you.

What is Pure Land Buddhism?

The Pure Land tradition is one of the most popular living schools of Buddhism. It teaches that if we are adequately mindful of Amitabha Buddha, we can be reborn into an ideal utopian world created with his compassion and wisdom. In this world, we learn the Dharma directly from the enlightened, understand how to become a Bodhisattva to benefit others, and become nothing less than a fully enlightened Buddha. Due to the nature of pervasive Dharma in Pure Land, enlightenment is guaranteed. It is simple to practise, yet does not compromise the profundity of all-encompassing compassion and wisdom.

Is Pure Land Hard to Believe In?

The Buddha did "warn" in the Amitabha Sutra that the Pure Land teaching is very difficult to accept in faith. Perhaps because it sounds wondrously fantastical. But, if you spend time and effort to study the Pure Land scriptures and commentaries by great masters, you will agree that it is probably one of the most skilful means ever devised by the Buddhas to firmly guide beings towards liberation. It is crucial to develop an open heart and mind. It is also worth remembering that the Buddhas have absolutely no reason to lie to us, and that there are many case studies of Pure Land practitioners, even in our day and age, who have manifested signs of attaining birth in Pure Land.

Is Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha Real?

Pure Lands, being natural worlds blessed by the

presence and merits of Buddhas, definitely exist. If an unenlightened human being can create a worldly "paradise" in his community, it is infinitely more possible for the Buddhas who have perfected practice of the Dharma to create living paradises by their boundless merits. It is thus that, the Buddha explained that billions of Pure Lands exist, just that beings fail to perceive them as their minds are not pure enough. Amitabha Buddha is just one of the countless Buddhas with Pure Lands that the Buddha chose to teach us about, due to its excellence.

Is Pure Land Just Another Heaven?

While Pure Land is described as heavenly in its surroundings, it is much more than a typical heavenly realm. Every element in it reminds its inhabitants of the Buddhas, the Dharma and the Sangha with the aim of directing its beings towards enlightenment. The lifespan of the beings there is also limitless - due to the continual creation of merits by practising the Dharma, as compared to heavens with long but limited spans of existence. Beings in such heavens also generally have a great tendency to become complacent of needing to learn the Dharma, and eventually fall to the lower realms after the exhaustion of merits.

What is the Main Principle of Pure Land Buddhism?

"Mindfulness of Buddha is the cause, becoming a Buddha is the effect" sums up the operating principle of Pure Land Buddhism. It is described in the scriptures that even the Bodhisattvas of the highest rank need to be mindful of his/her goal of becoming a Buddha. If so, it is surely wise

for us to also be as mindful of the Buddha (and his virtues) as much as possible. Doing so, we will more likely be inspired to become like the Buddha, by emulating his great compassion and wisdom. When practising mindfulness of the Buddha, one ultimately aspires to be with a Buddha (in Pure Land, so as to learn from him) and aspires to become a Buddha.

How Does Birth in Pure Land Work?

The Buddhas discovered that the most traumatic moment of our lives - on our deathbeds - is actually a pivotal point in determining the destination of our next birth since the nature of our last thoughts will link us to a rebirth of corresponding nature. Death thus is a powerful opportunity for directing ourselves to Pure Land, an ideal world for furthering and perfecting our practice of the Dharma. However, this does not mean Pure Land Buddhism focuses only on last minute deathbed practice, since how we conduct our lives greatly influence the nature of our last thoughts. If one practises mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha well in daily life, one is more likely to be peacefully mindful of him upon departure, and thus arrive at his Pure Land.

Is Pure Land Buddhism Only for the Dying?

Pure Land Buddhism is for the young and very much alive too! As taught by the Pure Land masters: if we practise mindfulness of the Buddha well in this life, it is possible to catch glimpses of Pure Land in our world, as long as we are able to sustain the purity of our mind. This is because "when the mind is pure, the land (the world as perceived) is pure". Such inspirational experiences can alter the course of our lives for the better once and for all. All the inevitable suffering of this world then becomes "inconsequential" as we have increased faith in our ability to reach Pure Land, where purity of mind is more easily sustained. But the Pure Land teachings do not forsake this world. In the compassionate spirit of the Buddhas, beings in Pure Land are encouraged to return to help teach all beings the path to enlightenment. The emphasis on the importance of having good spiritual roots and cultivating merits as provisions to deserve birth in Pure Land also ensures we do our best to make this world a living Pure Land by our every thought, word and deed. Surely, it is not right to desecrate this world while expecting to deserve a better one.

How to Practise Pure Land Buddhism?

Very concisely, one needs to cultivate great faith and aspiration, and practice for birth in Pure Land to be possible. We need faith that the Pure Land teachings are true, great aspiration to be born there (to be enlightened, so as to better help all sentient beings), and to practise the foundational teachings of Buddhism like the observation of morality (by the precepts). But most of all, it is to practise mindfulness of the Buddha by mindful verbal or silent recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name (or remembrance

of his virtues). Doing so, we learn to awaken our Buddha-nature and function more like a Buddha, with compassion and wisdom. When mindfulness of the Buddha is practised well, calmness and concentration will follow, which then allows for the realisation of wisdom. It is stated in the Amitabha Sutra that if one can be steadily mindful of Amitabha Buddha with uninterrupted single-pointedness for one's final ten thoughts, rebirth in Pure Land will be assured. It is most wise to habitually practise in daily life to ensure that these ten pure thoughts will be possible! One should allocate time everyday to study the Pure Land teachings and practise mindfulness of the Buddha as much as possible.

How Pure Land Practice Leads to Buddhahood

Below are instructional verses by Venerable Ou Yi, the Ninth Chinese Patriarch of Pure Land Buddhism (藕益大师), which illustrate how perfect mindfulness of the Buddha can remarkably fulfil all the six perfections! And this leads to nothing less than Buddhahood.

Practice of the Six Perfections by Mindfulness of the Buddha:

真能念佛，放下身心世界，即大布施。

In true mindfulness of the Buddha, letting go of attachment to one's body, mind and the world is the great Perfection of Giving.

真能念佛，不负起贪嗔痴，即大持戒。

In true mindfulness of the Buddha, not giving rise to any thought of greed, hatred or ignorance is the great Perfection of Morality.

真能念佛，不计是非人我，即大忍辱。

In true mindfulness of the Buddha, not being attached to conflicts or hearsay of others and oneself is the Great Perfection of Patience.

真能念佛，不间断不夹杂，即大精进。

In true mindfulness of the Buddha, having neither a slight break of continuity of mindfulness nor any confused thoughts in between is the Great Perfection of Effort.

真能念佛，不复妄想驰逐，即大禅定。

In true mindfulness of the Buddha, neither giving rise to, driven by nor chasing after stray thoughts is the Great Perfection of Concentration.

真能念佛，不为他歧所惑，即大智慧。

In true mindfulness of the Buddha, not being tempted by any delusion is the Great Perfection of Wisdom.

Thoughts from a Post-Prison Buddhist...

By Mark Chesterfield

I thought practising Buddhism was difficult in prison - that was until I was released...

After having spent a relatively short time in prison and devoting an even shorter amount of time to the study and practice of Buddhism, I thought that life on the outside was going to be a breeze - how wrong I was!

Coping with the demands of life on the outside together with the knowledge that every single thought, word or action will lead to some sort of karmic response can be a heavy load to endure at times. On the inside you could follow 'the code': Watch your own back and silently pray for the sake of those who may harm you.

But on the outside you quickly learn that it is not the sharp weapon wielded by the hand of another that one has to be so mindful of, rather it is one's own 'monkey mind' that can quickly get one 'stabbed'.

You have much more freedom on the outside. Freedom to go wherever you want, freedom to meet whomever you wish, and the freedom to be your own "boss". Of course, along with all this freedom comes the post-prison Dharma practitioner's worst nightmare - temptation.

An unbelievably strong desire to indulge in all those things that you've been denied for so long. Sure sex, alcohol and drugs are all a possibility in prison, but the possibilities

of these indulgences are absolutely mind-boggling in their complexity and availability on the outside. What about the simple bar of chocolate? "Holding" a bar of this can get you seriously injured or even killed on the inside, yet on the outside you can buy it by the shopping bag full and eat it until you vomit.



Yes, life on the outside with all its accompanying temptations is difficult, made even more so by the fact that one has so much more freedom.

But what is the most difficult, yet at the same time most rewarding aspect of living the life of a Buddhist (whether that be on the 'inside', or on the 'outside') is the knowledge that we can no longer use ignorance as the defence for the unwise decisions that we make - and this can only be a good thing.

For with knowledge, comes wisdom, and with wisdom, comes compassion.

Since 2000, Liberation Prison Project (LPP) has been responding to the requests of thousands of inmates worldwide for advice and support in their practice and study of Buddhism. Aiming to help develop their human potential, LPP offers advice, books, video and audio tapes, CDs and practice materials. A network of teachers, visiting and by correspondence, is in place along with penpals. For more information, visit www.LiberationPrisonProject.org

Physically in the house of no-release, but when the mind is practising Dharma, it becomes the house for ultimate real liberation from the real samsaric prison.

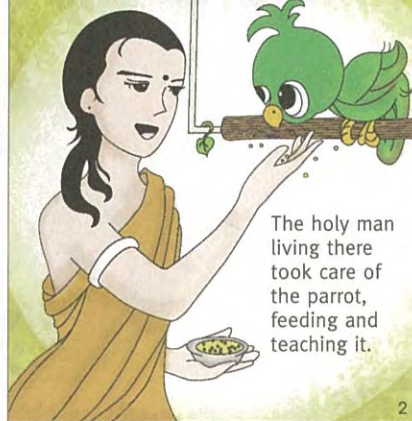
- Lama Zopa Rinpoche

The Little Parrot's Story

Illustration: Bee Li



A baby parrot went to live in a forest monastery.



The holy man living there took care of the parrot, feeding and teaching it.

One day...

the holy man warned...

Look, parrot, you must be careful! A hunter often comes to this jungle. He spreads grains and sets traps for birds.

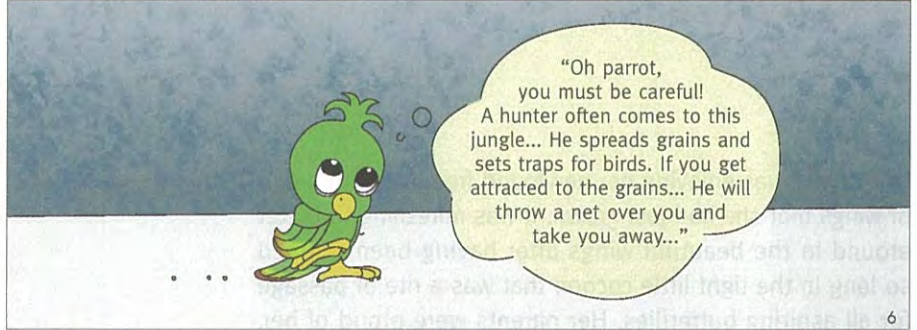
Oh parrot, you must be careful!



The hunter will spread grains. If you get attracted to the grains, he will throw a net over you and take you away.

Oh parrot, you must be careful!

The parrot memorised the words of the holy man and repeated them over and over again as parrots do.



"Oh parrot, you must be careful! A hunter often comes to this jungle... He spreads grains and sets traps for birds. If you get attracted to the grains... He will throw a net over you and take you away..."



Everyday, the baby parrot memorised the words of the holy man, even in its dreams.

"...Oh... parrot ... zz... you... zz ... must... be... z ... careful! ... z ..."

As the parrot was carried away in the net, it kept repeating what the holy man had taught him...



"Oh parrot, you must be careful!"

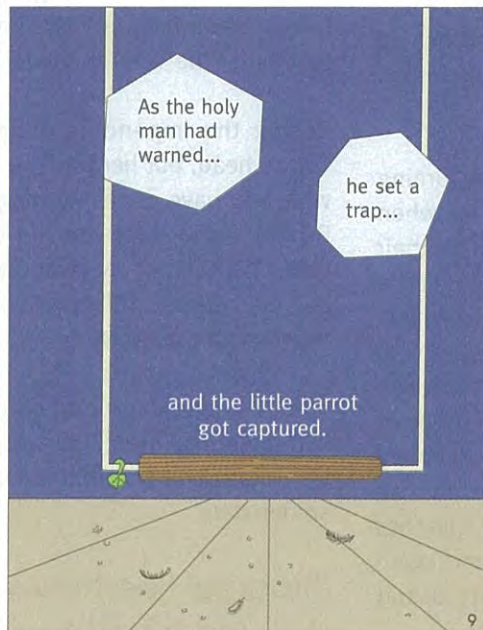
"The hunter will come, he will spread grains. If you get attracted to the grains..."

"He will throw a net over you and take you away."

"Oh parrot, you must be careful!"



One day... The hunter did come.



As the holy man had warned...

he set a trap...

and the little parrot got captured.

The parrot was very good at repeating those words, but it had no understanding of the truth and wisdom in them!

Anyone can repeat the words of wisdom spoken by wise people. But unless each of us develop wisdom within ourselves, we are just like parrots, echoing words that have no meaning to us. Practising Anapana sati (mindfulness of breath meditation) and following the Five Precepts help one to develop strength and calmness of mind such that it becomes easier to avoid bad situations in life.

Story was adapted from "S.N. Goenka Teachings".

Little Sister Plant

By Ng Pei Fuen

Little Catty was enjoying her newfound freedom with a pair of wings that she had just grown. It was refreshing to flutter around in the beautiful wings after having been trapped so long in the tight little cocoon that was a rite of passage for all aspiring butterflies. Her parents were proud of her, their beautiful caterpillar daughter transformed into a dazzling, fluttering display of colour.

How wonderful youth and vitality is! As Catty basked in her strength, she flew as far from home as she could, enjoying the sights and sounds. She saw other cocoons and older butterflies that were beginning to fade in their colour and strength. She stopped on every other lovely sweet flower for a sniff, saying, "Look at me! Look at my graceful flight, enjoy my beauty!" Her heart leapt each time a passing bee, fly or beetle slowed down to look at her. Sometimes, a passing human child tried to scoop her up in their giant hands. But with her young, strong wings, she was too quick for them!

She flew home proud and amazed that she was turning heads and feelers. She began to stick her head up when she saw poor caterpillars crawling about waiting for their turn to morph. "Oh dear, how slow you are going! Let me teach you how to become a beautiful butterfly like me!" As caterpillars gathered to listen to her, she impressed with accounts of how she stayed perfectly still in the cocoon so that her wings would not be scratched or marred, or how she would choose a place, which is far from fumbling beetles and nasty grasshoppers, to hang her cocoon. The young and envious caterpillars applauded her fluent speeches with their rows of legs and asked her to fly around again and again so that they could admire the beauty of her wings and set goals for their own transformation.



Meantime, her arrogance was getting a bit too much for her elders. Fame had gone to her head and she began to think that she was far superior to them, that she knew all the tricks to being a gorgeous butterfly which her jaded, lacklustre seniors did not.

One day, Catty was flying around, showing off her wings as usual. She was so engrossed in the act that she did not see a spider weaving up his web right in her flying tracks. She whammed straight into the sticky web. Within moments, the veteran spider was moving in for his meal.

Seeing the impending danger, alarm bells went off in Catty's head, but her pride remained. She screamed, "Look what you have done! My wings are all stuck and crumpled! Do you know who you are dealing with? I'm Catty! THE Catty! Wait till all my butterfly and caterpillar friends come and get you! You still have a chance to get me disentangled from this mess. NOW!"

Spidey grinned and rubbed his four pairs of legs in glee. "Struggle! The more you struggle, the tighter the grip! Ha! Ha! This is an invincible formula passed down through the spider clan.

Struggle! See how your mind flutters just like your silly little wings!"



By now, Catty was paralysed with fear. She truly felt that the more she struggled, the tighter and more enmeshed her wings and filmy tube of a body were clinging to the web. The invincible and invisible trap. Her mind went blank.

At this time, a familiar voice rang. "Oh Catty... if only I had told you the story of little sister plant earlier. Then you may have escaped this tragic fate today."

Spidey and Catty looked up to see the branch that the web was latched on speaking with regret and compassion.

Branch continued, "The day you grew wings, I feared for you. I have seen so many newly morphed butterflies become pompous, flaunting and proud. You grew too big for your head, and flew too high for your wings.... well, not just you, but every other young butterfly that had ever flown my way. They all think they are the best and the most beautiful. Look below me. What do you see?"

Catty stole a glance and saw a pile of faded, broken butterfly wings at the root of the old tree. It sent a shudder through her tiny spine. She knew her time was up.

"My time is up." This thought struck her and she realised nothing mattered anymore. She calmed down and looked at Spidey in the eye. "Do you have enough compassion for me to hear a last story before you eat me?"

Spidey looked at the entwined, helpless Catty and thought, "Well, she can't escape anyway!" He nodded smugly at Catty and Branch.

Branch sighed and started. "If little sister plant were around today, she would be able to tell you her story. But since she has long gone back to the elements, I'll relate her story to you. We were such close friends.... Sigh. Anyway....

Branch looked like he was melting away into his memories of the past...

The first time I met little sister plant, she was young. So very young. She was a bright shade of green, a little pale and when she first broke through the soil she could not stand properly. I doted on her so I sheltered and took her into shade.

Soon, she grew strong and stood proudly upright. I was proud of her too! In the beginning, she would lie close to me and thank me for protecting her. When she grew taller and further off the ground, she saw more of the outside world and in no time was longing to move out of my cover.

Other ignorant young plants she met also advised her to extend her roots further out so that she could get out of my shade.

She did just that. And shortly, she was exposed to the elements. The thunderstorm, the mighty blast of a wind, the whispering wind, the sweltering heat of the midday sun, the seasons etc. At first, she fought. When the thunderstorm pelted on her, she would resist the heavy drops and stood up tall while the more mature ones relaxed and let the drops weigh on them. She strained her veins because of this and soon stood a little wilted to her left. But she fought on.

When the sun came and the other plants huddled close to their stems to minimise water loss, she would spread herself out as if challenging the sun to come and evaporate her. She withered her tips in the process and began to go flip-flop in the wind instead of her previous graceful sway.

She resisted everything and tried hard to stand up tall and strong. She liked to be the tallest amongst her fellow plants, but that also meant she was hit the hardest in the rain, dehydrated the most in the hot sun and trampled from a higher height by human feet.

One morning, she found that she could not stand with her stem straight. She was bent and weary. Poor little sister plant. She became depressed and stopped eating and drinking. At her lowest point, she laid down on the bare earth staring at the roots of other plants, thinking why all her efforts to be the best had brought her to such a state.

She looked around at her fellow plant friends. They were green, cheerful and swaying strong in the wind. She realised they must be right in what they were doing to be able to stay green and strong for so long.

She stopped lamenting. Instead, she began observing and listening to other plants. After days of observation, she smiled.

She finally understood.

She waved weakly at me, smiled and thanked me for always supporting her. In her whispering weak voice, she told me the secret of staying everlasting green and strong:

I have to let go
of my ego,
dear brother Branch.

I need to bow when the rain comes so that the water flows down naturally.



Buddhist Fiction: A Youth Day Special

I need to relax when the wind blows so that I don't injure myself holding up against it.

I need to be humble and stay low to the ground when humans come, so that I won't be a target for trampling on.

I've been too brash, too proud and too attention-seeking.

Youth comes but once and leads to maturity for the wise but the foolish ones like me pass away when youth had barely passed - burning ourselves in youthful pride. We play like we have no tomorrow and think that when tomorrow comes, we are still young!

When I stood brazenly tall with my young bones, I looked down on the older, wiser plants. Sometimes they tried to tell me things, but I deliberately braced myself up higher so that they couldn't get to me. How silly.

It's too late now... I can feel the water draining down through my roots. I've lost too much water to ever stand again. I've spent my youth, fought too hard for the wrong reasons. Please brother Branch, do me a favour."

Drops of water appeared on the tip of Branch.

She said: "Do me a favour. Tell my story to other plants, insects and those who are intoxicated with youth. Tell them, so that they may go on to the next stage of their lives wisely, putting their youthful energy to good use.

Tell them to be mindful of their intentions, respectful of their elders, generous in sharing their wisdom and ALWAYS be humble.

Never stand tall. The tallest one always gets hit first because he is most obvious.

Instead, be humble. Bend a little lower, and stoop a little.

Or they may become like me, flat on the ground, brought down to earth not by choice but after being floored by folly....

Thank you brother Branch for your friendship, goodbye..."

Catty felt a violent shake beneath her and realised that Spidey was sobbing, sending vibrations across the sticky web. She felt tears welling up in her eyes too. "What great advice, but it came too late!" she thought. As she cried, her tiny tears dropped onto the invincible web.

And as her good karma goes, the invincible web was not waterproof.



With Spidey's vigorous shakes and her own flowing tears, Catty felt the web loosen. For a moment, her mind geared into alertness. She slowly wriggled her wings - space!

She glanced quickly at the emotional Spidey who was still absorbed in his own thoughts, and with all the strength she could summon, heaved her wings violently away from the web.

And she was free!

Branch cheered, Spidey was stunned and Catty was transformed.

Becoming a colourful butterfly was not the real transformation. Being released from a near-death situation, one brought about by her own foolishness, heedlessness and infatuation with self, shook her entire spiritual self.

Now she was truly transformed.

*The foolish and ignorant
indulge in heedlessness,
but the wise ones keep his heedfulness
as his best treasure.*

*Do not give way to heedlessness.
Do not indulge in sensual pleasures.
Only the heedful and meditative
Attain great happiness.*

~ Dhammapada verse 26 & 27 ~



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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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Seen, Heard & Read...

By Esther Thien & Shen Shi'an

Seen

The ways of the Bodhisattva can be seen everywhere

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

Directed by: Andrew Adamson

Starring: Tilda Swinton

Based on a Christian-inspired children's fantasy novel by C.S Lewis, four children find themselves transported to the wonderland of Narnia via a wardrobe closet. With Narnia frozen over by a winter that never ends, the children are enlisted to help Aslan (the Great Lion who is also the founder of Narnia) defeat the evil White Witch (Swinton), break her evil spell, and free the people and magical beasts of Narnia. But this film can be seen from a Buddhist context too.

In one scene, Aslan, in his selfless act of sacrificing his life to save that of Edward, mirrors that of the Bodhisattva ideal and practice of the perfection of giving. The Jataka tales – stories of the Buddha's former lives when He was still a practising Bodhisattva – also tells us the Buddha was once born as a fearless, self-sacrificing lion king that inspired much awe and respect from other animals.

Secondly, you will notice in the film that the ideas of prophecy and destiny are frequently emphasised. The four protagonist children were predicted to be the ones who will save Narnia. The bewilderment of their foretold destiny reminds us of the cynicism some nominal Buddhists may show when told we were all prophesised by the Buddha to eventually become fully Enlightened Ones like Himself - as long as we put in the right effort to actualise the potential of our Buddha-nature.



Fearless

Directed by: Ronny Yu

Starring: Jet Li, Michelle Yeoh

Fearless is Jet Li's most important martial arts epic, and one which is interestingly peppered with timeless Buddhist lessons. Asthmatic and weak from a young age, Huo Yuanjia craves to master martial arts to defeat those who bullied him. He soon conquers his physical limitations but not his ego. Spurred by impetuosity over an assumed wrong, he manslaughters a man in a duel unknowingly, whose vengeful servant, in turn then kills his family. This brings to mind the Buddha's teaching: "Hatred can never be ceased by hatred; hatred can only be ceased by love." In seeking vengeance for his slayed family, Huo Yuanjia confronts his opponent again, only to realise he was already dead, and grieved over by a family as grievous as he over his.

Repentant and disillusioned, he retreats to the countryside where he learns to be less restless and more mindful, and is transformed spiritually. An especially delightful scene to note is the profound conversation he had with a fellow martial artist during tea upon his return home. Just like tea grows naturally without differentiating, likewise, among the 84,000 teachings of the Buddha, there is no superior or inferior teaching. Different sentient beings have different preferences and needs in the moment, with every teaching effective only if it is diligently practised.

Poisoned by his enemies in his final battle to restore national pride, he became weak, yet mindful and compassionate enough to refrain from delivering a death blow before collapsing. What does it mean to be fearless? It is the courage to face loss, even the loss of one's pride or something as dear as one's life. Thus, the Buddha, who has realised the illusion of ego and transcended life and death, is indeed a truly fearless hero!



Learn Buddhist insights for enduring happiness in an uncertain world

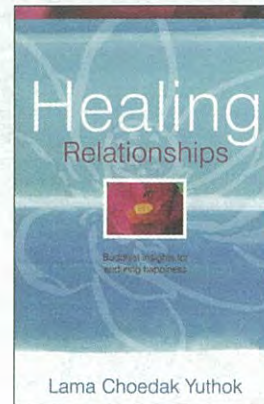
Read

Healing Relationships:

Buddhist insights for enduring happiness

By Lama Choedak Yuthok

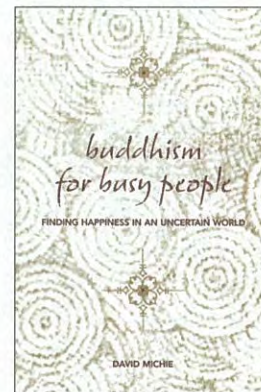
Our feelings and attitudes about our relationships reveal the level of contentment, happiness and our ability to express love. This book explores the difficulties and their causes, from a Buddhist perspective, in keeping our relationships vibrant and healthy. Throughout *Healing Relationships* are meditations and practices to help us develop better mental clarity, transform our attitudes, forgive and heal, and to connect with others in positive ways that will empower our life and make it more meaningful. Priced S\$31.90 at Awareness Place.



Buddhism for Busy People

By David Michie

What does it take to be happy? In this simple but beautifully written book, David Michie shows us how, by incorporating Buddhist practices into our daily lives, we can walk the path to lasting fulfilment. Available from Awareness Place for S\$23.50.



Heard

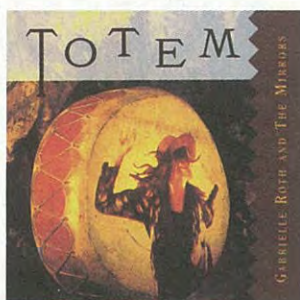
Rekindle your child-like glee, and evoke the spirit of ecstasy with these unique music albums



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By Gabrielle Roth & the Mirrors

Fusing unique strains of ancient and modern music produces this distinctive musical album that features the sounds of percussion, synthesizers and flutes. Available from Awareness Place for S\$22.50.

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. Amitabha Sutra is one of the three cardinal Pure Land Sutras.

Anapanasati: mindfulness of breath meditation.

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.

Conditioned Arising: states that all phenomena arise depending upon a number of causal 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. Also called Dependent or Interdependent Origination.

Cyclic existence: The cycle of death and rebirth, taking uncontrolled rebirth under the influence of defilements and karmic imprints. The process arises out of ignorance and is marked by suffering.

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.

Four Noble Truths: 1. Life is full of dissatisfactory experiences - ageing, sickness, separation, death etc 2. Causes of dissatisfactory experiences -

craving, aversion and ignorance 3. Life can be without dissatisfaction - by attaining Enlightenment or Nirvana 4. The path leading to the end of dissatisfactions - The Noble Eightfold path.

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.

Lama: Spiritual teacher. An honorary title in Tibetan Buddhism given to one who has completed particular scholastic and yogic training. It is possible to renounce one's monkhood without renouncing one's lama status, for the purposes of marriage.

Liberation: State after removing the defilements and karma which cause uncontrolled rebirth in cyclic existence.

Loving-kindness: The quality which makes us wish for the happiness and well-being of others. 'Metta' in Pali language.

Mahamudra: Great Seal. A form of meditation on how to observe the mind.

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

Mantra: Prescribed syllables (in Sanskrit) to protect the mind from defilements. They express the essence of specific energies. Recitation of mantras is always done with specific visualisations.

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.

Merits: Blessings, positive potential. Imprints on the mindstream of positive actions, leading to future happiness.

Noble Eightfold Path: A systematic and complete formula to rid dissatisfaction and attain true happiness and peace by following Perfect Speech, Perfect Action, Perfect Livelihood, Perfect Effort, Perfect Mindfulness, Perfect Meditation, Perfect Understanding, Perfect Thought (pls read Be A Lamp Upon Yourself published by KMSPKS for detailed info).

Nirvana: The attainment of release from suffering and rebirth.

Parasita: 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.

Vesak Day: Wesak in Pali, it commemorates the Birth, Enlightenment and Nirvana of Shakyamuni Buddha.

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

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

Your Feedback Matters

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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



The Four Immeasurables

The Buddha taught the following to his son Rahula:

Rahula, practise loving-kindness to overcome anger. Loving-kindness has the capacity to bring happiness to others without demanding anything in return.

Practise compassion to overcome cruelty. Compassion has the capacity to remove the suffering of others without expecting anything in return.

Practise sympathetic joy to overcome hatred. Sympathetic joy arises when one rejoices over the happiness of others and wishes others well-being and success.

Practise non-attachment to overcome prejudice. Non-attachment is the way of looking at all things openly and equally. This is because that is. Myself and others are not separate. Do not reject one thing only to chase after another.

I call these the four immeasurables. Practise them and you will become a refreshing source of vitality and happiness for others.

(from "Old path, White clouds" by Thich Nhat Hahn)