

琴韵禅心一味同

《法华经·方便品》中说：“若使人作乐，击鼓吹角贝，箫笛琴笙篪，琵琶铙铜鼓，如是众妙音，尽持以供奉，乃至一小音，皆共成佛道。”

小小牧童能解经文
给老人一个帮忙的机会
般若慧海 唯饮一瓢

Is it Important to Take
Refuge in the Triple Gem?

The Benefits of Taking
Refuge

Taking refuge is the door to the Buddha's teachings, says Ven. Thubten Chodron

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**WATCH OUT,
Youth!**

***w*s*d*p**

A weekly event organised by the Youth Ministry to support personal and spiritual development of young adults. They are relevant, practical and designed to help youth increase their personal effectiveness.

Be it movie screenings, Dharma sharing, holistic workshops, or music sessions, book reviews, personal sharing sessions and more... *w*s*d*p is where you will find them. To find out our latest line-up each week, just visit our website or contact us directly!

Every Thursday evening, 7.30pm - 9.30pm

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www.kmspks.org/youth

weekly personal and spiritual development activities supporting young adults
organised by the Youth Ministry at Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery



Editor's Note

Have you ever wondered what the significance of taking refuge in the Triple Gem is? Are you someone whom the Buddha's sayings and teachings strike a chord with, but have not mustered enough courage or faith to go for refuge in the Triple Gem? You may even think, "Why is it important? Isn't it more fundamental that I practise and apply the teachings in my life?"

Well, then you have to read what Bhikkhu Bodhi has to say on why it is essential to take refuge in the Triple Gem if you are someone who's serious about your practice (pg 36). Not only does refuge-taking act as the door to all the practices of the Buddhist discipline, it also confers a multitude of benefits such as purifying and eliminating one's negative karmic imprints (pg 50, 59). As with Ng Pei Fuen's reflection that the body is not a safe refuge (pg 55), let everyone's refuge be with the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Also read what others say about what triggered them to take refuge in the Three Jewels (pg 54). According to Thanissaro Bhikkhu, there are two levels of refuge, internal and external. The internal level is where true refuge is found. (back cover)

Elsewhere in this issue, Ven. Dr Chang Qing talks about the function of Zen meditation (pg 42), and youth workers Cell, Billy and Renee give their two cents worth on the value of interfaith exchanges (pg 44).

In another article, Lilian Yeo writes about her realisation "that the difficult moments... in our lives are as transient as the passing clouds", as are the happy moments (pg 55), reinforcing Ven. Ajahn Chah's teaching that there is nothing but the birth, the life and the death of suffering (pg 47). Happiness, unhappiness, love and hate are merely impressions, established according to the law of nature, which flare up in the mind and then die. But because we cling onto them, we suffer.

Yet, it is also because there is suffering in our heart, that it is possible for us to enter the Buddha's heart, says Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh (pg 62). This teaching is echoed by Gampopa (pg 39), for pain is a spiritual friend, that brings about renunciation.

Still, to enter the Dharma ocean and obtain its precious treasures, besides refuge-taking, we have to practise virtuous deeds (pg 58). We have to look within, develop our inner quality of what is truly good by actualising the Dharma through the complete practice of virtue, concentration and discernment (pg 60).

Otherwise, we would never achieve liberation from the unending cycle of birth and death.

Here's wishing all a spiritually awakening new year.



Esther Thien

Yours in the Dharma,
Esther Thien

Ushering Chinese New Year with a Resounding "gong"

Pujas & prayers • 108 Bell Resonances
Date/Time : 25 Jan, Sunday, 11.30pm
Venue : Hall of Great Compassion
Details : For more information, please call 6549 5300

Dharma Talk Series –

Buddhist Responses to the Contemporary Ethical Issues

Date/Time : 1 – 22 Feb, Every Sunday, 9.30am – 11.00am
Venue : Dharma Hall
Speaker : Ven. Chuan Cheng
Details : Free admission. For more information, please call 6849 5300

*w*s*d*p

An excellent 1st step in learning about Buddhism and its application

Date/Time : Every Thursday, 7.30pm – 9.30pm
(starting from 5 Feb)
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Short courses introducing Buddhist teachings, concepts and practices

Date/Time : Every Saturday, 6.30pm – 8.00pm
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Venue : Awareness Place Well-Being Centre
Bras Basah Complex #03-39

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Basic Vipassana (Insight) Meditation Class

Date/Time : 6 Feb – 17 Apr, Every Tuesday, 7.30pm – 9.30pm
Venue : 4th floor, Ven Hong Choon Memorial Hall
Fee : \$30
Conductor : Ven. Chuan Ren
Details : For more information, please call 6849 5300

PKS English Buddhism Course

Year 1 Module 1

Date/Time : 16 Feb – 13 Apr, Every Monday, 7.30pm – 9.00pm
Fee : \$30
Venue : 1st floor, Ven Hong Choon Memorial Hall

Year 2 Module 1

Date/Time : 8 Feb – 12 Apr, Every Sunday, 2.00pm – 3.30pm
Fee : \$30
Venue : Dharma Hall

New Course – 'Abhidhamma in Daily Life' Module 1

Date/Time : 12 Feb – 16 Apr, Every Thursday, 7.30pm – 9.00pm
Fee : \$30
Venue : 1st floor, Ven Hong Choon Memorial Hall

Details : For more information, please call 6849 5300 or fax your enquiry to 64526341, Attn: SEMD

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Yoga for General

Date/Time : 12 Jan – 23 Mar, Monday, 7.30pm – 9.00pm
14 Jan – 25 Mar, Wednesday, 7.30pm – 9.00pm
Fee : \$160 (10 lessons)
Conductor : Mr. Jason Lim Heng Moh

Afternoon Yoga

Date/Time : 16 Jan – 27 Mar, Friday, 3.00pm – 4.30pm
Fee : \$160 (10 lessons)
Conductor : Mr. Jason Lim Heng Moh

Morning Yoga

Date/Time : 17 Jan – 28 Mar, Saturday, 9.30am – 11.00am
Fee : \$160 (10 lessons)
Conductor : Mr. Jason Lim Heng Moh

Children's Art Class

Date/Time : 7 Feb – 25 Apr, Saturday, 2.00pm – 4.00pm
Fee : \$50 (12 lessons)
Conductor : Mr. Soh Chin Bee, graduate from Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts

Taiji (Yang Style) – Beginners

Date/Time : 8 Feb – 29 Mar, Sunday, 9.30am – 11.00am
Fee : \$150 (8 lessons)
Conductor : Ms. Jasmine Koh, Accredited Coach with The Singapore Sports Council

Organic Educational Tour (conducted in Mandarin)

Date/Time : 15 Mar, Sunday
Fee : \$65 (inclusive of 3 organic meals)
Conductor : Mr. Wong Kew Yew (Bach. Biotech)

Metta Meditation Classes (conducted in Mandarin)

Date/Time : 1 Mar – 22 Mar, Sunday, 3.00pm – 4.30pm
Fee : \$30 (4 lessons)
Conductor : Venerable Chuan Ren

Vegetarian Wellness Course

Date/Time : 26 Apr – 19 Jul, Sunday, 2.00pm – 4.00pm
Fee : \$200 (9 lessons – lectures, cooking, organic trip)
Conductor : Mr. Wong Kew Yew (Bach. Biotech)

Venue : Awareness Place Well-Being Centre
Bras Basah Complex #03-39

Details : Please visit www.awarenessplace.com, email semd@kmspks.org or call 6336 5067 to register or enquire for the above programmes

Relaxation Meditation Course

Date/Time : 10 Feb – 14 Apr, Every Friday, 8.00pm – 9.30pm
Venue : 4th floor, Ven Hong Choon Memorial Hall
Details : For more information, please call 6849 5300

Medicine Buddha Sutra Recitation (Chinese)

Date/Time : 21 Feb, Every Saturday, 7.45pm – 9.45pm
Venue : Pagoda of Ten Thousand Buddhas, 2nd Level

Pureland Sutra Recitation (Chinese)

Date/Time : 22 Feb, Every Sunday, 9.00am – 11.30am
Venue : Hall of Great Compassion

Diamond Sutra Recitation (Chinese)

Date/Time : 22 Feb, Every Sunday, 2.00pm – 3.45pm
Venue : Hall of Great Compassion

The Great Compassion Puja (Chinese)

Date/Time : Every 27th of the lunar month, 10.00am – 12.00pm
Venue : Hall of Great Compassion

Recitation of 25th Chapter of the Lotus Sutra (Pu Men Pin)

Date/Time : 20 Feb, Every Friday, 8.00pm – 9.30pm
Venue : Hall of Great Compassion

Details : For more information, please call 6849 5300

Is it Important to Take Refuge in the Triple Gem?

Q: Why is taking refuge in the Triple Gem important? — *Enquirer*

A: The going for refuge is the door of entrance to the teaching of the Buddha. It functions in the context of the teaching as the entranceway to all the practices of the Buddhist discipline.

To engage in the practices in their proper setting we have to enter them through the door of taking refuge, just as to go into a restaurant and have a meal we have to enter through the door. If we merely stand outside the restaurant and read the menu on the window we may come away with a thorough knowledge of the menu but not with a satiated appetite. Similarly, by merely studying and admiring the Buddha's teaching we do not enter upon its practice. Even if we extract certain elements of practice for our personal use without first taking refuge, our efforts cannot count as the actual practice of the Buddha's teaching. They are only practices derived from the teaching, or practices in harmony with the teaching, but so long as they are not conjoined with a mental attitude of taking refuge in the Triple Gem they have not yet become the practice of the Buddha's teaching.

To bring out the significance of going for refuge we can consider a contrast between two individuals. One meticulously observes the moral principles embedded in the five precepts (*pañcasīla*). He does not formally undertake the precepts in the context of Buddhist ethical practice but spontaneously conforms to the standards of conduct they enjoin through his own innate sense of right and wrong; that is, he follows them as part of natural morality. We might further suppose that he practises meditation several hours a day, but does this not in the framework of the Dhamma (Dharma) but simply as a means to enjoy peace of mind here and now.

We can further suppose that this person has met the Buddha's teaching, appreciates it and respects it, but does not feel sufficiently convinced to acknowledge its truth or find himself impelled to go for refuge.

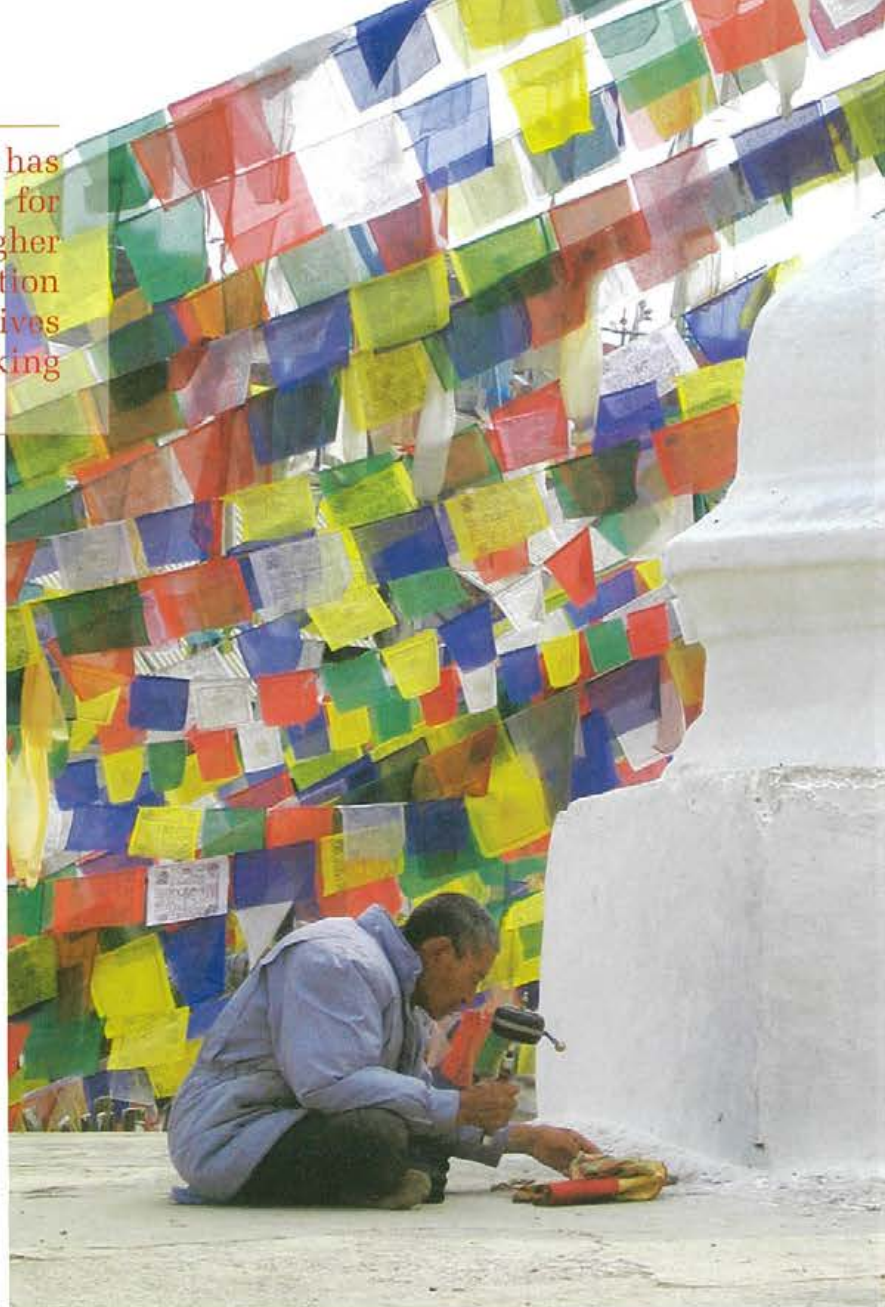
On the other hand, let us suppose there is another person whose circumstances prevent perfect observance of the precepts and who cannot find leisure for practising meditation. But though he lacks these achievements, from the depths of his heart, with full sincerity, understanding and dedication of purpose, he has gone for refuge to the Triple Gem. Comparing these two persons we can ask whose mental attitude is of greater long-term spiritual value — that of the person who without going for refuge observes the moral principles embedded in the five precepts and practises meditation several hours a day, or that of the other person who cannot accomplish these practices but has sincerely gone for refuge to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. No clear pronouncement on this case is found in the suttas (sutras) and commentaries, but enough indication is given to support an intelligent guess. On this basis we would say that the mental attitude of the second person, who has gone for refuge with clear understanding and sincerity of heart, is of greater long-term spiritual value. The reason for such a judgment is as follows.

As a result of his moral and meditative practices the first individual will enjoy peace and happiness in his present life, and will accumulate merit which will lead to a favourable rebirth in the future. However, when that merit ripens, it will be exhausted and will expend its force without leading to further spiritual development. When the fortunate rebirth resulting from the merit comes to an end, it will be followed by rebirth in some other plane, as determined by stored-up kamma (karma), and the person will continue to revolve in the cycle of existence. His virtuous undertakings do not contribute directly to the transcending of the samsaric round.

On the other hand, the person who has sincerely gone to the Triple Gem for refuge, without being capable of higher practices, still lays the foundation for spiritual progress in future lives merely by his heartfelt act of seeking refuge.

Of course he has to reap the results of his kamma and cannot escape them by taking refuge, but all the same the mental act of going for refuge, if it is truly the focus of his inner life, becomes a powerful positive kamma in itself. It will function as a link tending to bring him into connection with the Buddha's dispensation in future lives, thereby aiding his chances for further progress. And if he fails to reach deliverance within the dispensation of the present Buddha it will very likely lead him to the dispensations of future Buddhas, until he eventually reaches the goal. Since this all comes about through the germination of that mental act of going for refuge, we can understand that the taking of refuge is very essential.

The importance of going for refuge can be further gauged through a textual simile comparing faith to a seed. Since faith is the motivating force behind the act of refuge, the analogy may be transferred to the refuge-act itself. We explained earlier that the mental act of going for refuge calls into play three cardinal faculties — understanding, will and emotion. These three faculties are already present even in that very simple, basic act of seeking refuge, contained there as seeds with the potential to develop into the flowers and fruits of the Buddhist spiritual life. The understanding that leads a man to go for refuge — the understanding of the danger and fearfulness of samsaric existence — this is the seed for the faculty of wisdom which eventually issues in direct penetration of the four noble truths. The element of volition is the seed for the will to renunciation — the driving force that impels a man to renounce his craving, enjoyments and egoistic attachments in order to go forth in search of liberation. It functions as well as the seed



for the practice of right effort, the sixth factor of the noble eightfold path, by which we strive to abandon unwholesome, impure mental states and to cultivate the wholesome and pure states. Devotion and reverence for the Triple Gem — these become the seed for the germination of “unwavering confidence” (aveccappasada), the assurance of a noble disciple whose confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha can never be shaken by any outside force. In this way the simple act of going for refuge serves as the threefold seed for the development of the higher faculties of right understanding, right effort and unshakable confidence. From this example we can again understand the taking of refuge to be very essential. 🙏

— Bhikkhu Bodhi

Emergency Preparedness Training for PKS Volunteers and Staff

BY | Esther Thien

Singapore — What if a fire was spreading rapidly in the midst of a large-scale prayer session conducted in the monastery? Would you know what to do? Would you know how to disperse the crowd and mete out emergency first aid to those who need it?

To handle such possible emergencies, close to 90 volunteers and staff of Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery attended the Emergency Preparedness courses held by the Singapore Civil Defence on 13 and 21 of September last year. The participants spent about three and half hours in a relaxed environment completing three modules, namely first aid, one-man CPR, fire safety and casualty evacuation.

In the course, the volunteers and staff learned first aid procedures such as the bandaging of different wounds, the use of various first aid equipment, and how to handle burns and scalds. During the one-man CPR module, the personnel of the Singapore Civil Defence Force even prepared four dummies for the participants to practise on besides giving a detailed account of the steps involved. In addition, the basic method to extinguish fires, how to use the different types of fire extinguishers, as well as evacuating casualties using stretchers were taught as well.

Possessing the emergency know-how, it was time to use the knowledge. The monastery held the Thomson Emergency Preparedness (EP) Day last October for the first time, in conjunction with Thomson Grassroots Organisations (GROs) and Thomson Inter-Racial Confidence Circle. Themed “A Multi-Racial, Multi-Religious Approach”, the highlight of the event was the EP scenario exercise where a fire was triggered off in the monastery. In a flash, 40 volunteers together with the Thomson Emergency Preparedness Team came to the rescue.



Some contacted the police, others evacuated the public to safety, and yet others helped to bandage the wounds of the “injured”. The Police and Singapore Civil Defence team soon arrived at the scene and swiftly doused the fire with advanced equipment, completing the exercise successfully!

Brother Lim Ah Tiam who was responsible for leading the other volunteers in the exercise said, “I’m very pleased with the performance of the volunteers. I feel this is a very meaningful activity as it allows us to be prepared in handling emergencies, and guards against the chaos of an emergency.” To prepare for this exercise, the volunteers had carried out a two-hour rehearsal jointly with the Singapore Civil Defence Force and the Police three days before.

In all, 3,500 residents attended the Thomson EP day. Besides witnessing the EP scenario exercise, members of the public were treated to inter-racial skits and performances and an interactive exhibition. These activities reinforced their emergency preparedness knowledge and fostered greater inter-racial and religious harmony. The monastery also set up numerous food and game stalls to satiate those looking for some good, clean fun and appetising food.



To top it off, Mr Hri Kumar Nair, Member of Parliament for Bishan-Toa Payoh Group Representative Constituency gamely abseiled down from the third level of Ven. Hong Choon Memorial Hall to thunderous applause. The abbot of the monastery, Ven. Sik Kwang Sheng also conducted a prayer ceremony together with the representatives of other religions for world peace and harmony. ☺

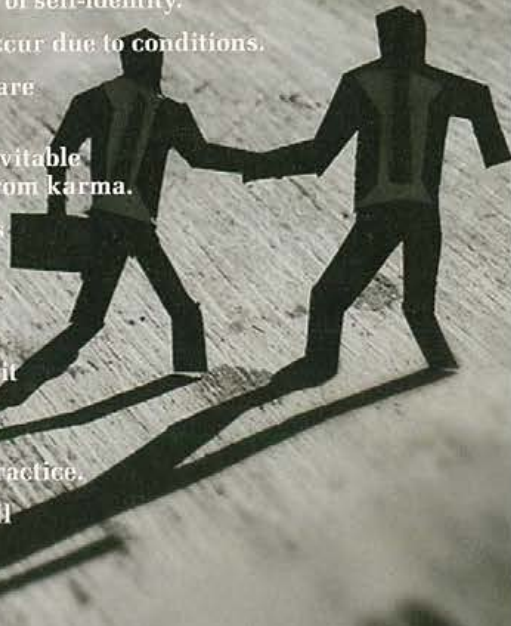


10 Things To Be Understood

1. Understand that outer appearances are unreal because they are mistaken.
2. Understand that inner mind is empty because it is devoid of self-identity.
3. Understand that thoughts are momentary because they occur due to conditions.
4. Understand that both your physical body and your voice are impermanent because they are conditioned.
5. Understand that the consequences of your actions are inevitable because all pleasure and pain of sentient beings results from karma.
6. Understand that pain is your spiritual friend because it is the cause of renunciation.
7. Understand that pleasure and happiness is the demon of attachment because it is the root of samsara.
8. Understand that many engagements are obstacles for merit because they hinder spiritual practice.
9. Understand that enemies and obstructors are your teachers because obstacles are inspiration for spiritual practice.
10. Understand that everything is of equal nature, because all phenomena are ultimately devoid of self-nature.

These are the ten things to understand.

— Gampopa, from *The Precious Garland of the Sublime Path*
(translated by Erik Pema Kunsang)



Show your guests that vegetarian foods need not be bland and boring with these two festive dishes.

Tofu Ball 豆腐丸



Ingredients:

Tofu 2 boxes, bread crumbs a little, potato flour a little, salt 1 1/2 tsp, sugar 1 tsp, sesame oil 1 tsp, pepper a pinch, cornflour 1 tsp, lettuce 2 pcs, mushroom essence a little, size chuan pepper salt a little

Chopped ingredients:

Mushroom 1pc, water chestnut 2 pcs, celery 2pcs, chilli padi 5pcs, vegetarian ham 30g, Jiu Cheng Ta 10 slices

Method:

1. Mash the tofu and add in the chopped ingredients, salt, sugar, mushroom essence, sesame oil, pepper and corn flour.
2. Mix some potato flour into the bread crumbs.
3. Make into balls, roll over the bread crumbs mixture and deep fry till golden brown.
4. With some oil, fry size chuan pepper salt and chilli padi. Pour over the deep fried tofu. Serve with lettuce.

用料:

板豆腐2盒、面包屑少许、生粉少许、盐1 1/2茶匙、糖1茶匙、麻油1茶匙、胡椒粉少许、玉米粉1汤匙、生菜2片、冬菇精少许、花椒盐少许

切碎用料:

冬菇1朵、马蹄2粒、芹菜2条、指天椒5粒、素火腿30克、九层塔10条

做法:

1. 豆腐搓碎。加入切碎料、盐、糖、冬菇精、麻油、胡椒粉和玉米粉一齐拌匀。
2. 面包屑加生粉拌匀。
3. 把才料做成一粒粒，沾面包屑炸至金黄色取出。
4. 油少许，炒花椒盐，指天椒撒在豆腐上即成。生菜拌边。

Fried Apple Pie 炸苹果派



Ingredients:

Green or red apple 1 1/2 kg, butter 4 tbsp, sugar 400gm, cinnamon powder 1/2 tsp, lemon juice 1 tsp, salt a pinch

Ingredients for skin:

Flour 500gm, icing sugar 1 tbsp, butter 100gm, water 200 - 250gm

Method:

1. Peel apple and cut into small pieces. Heat the butter and add in apples and sugar and cook for 20mins. Add cinnamon powder, lemon juice, salt and mix well.
2. To make the pastry, mix the flour, butter, icing sugar and water together, then let rest for 20mins. Roll the pastry into a thin flat rectangle shape and add the filling and seal the edge with fork.
3. Deep fry till golden brown.

材料:

青苹果或红苹果1 1/2公斤、面包油4汤匙、白糖400克、肉桂粉1/2茶匙、柠檬汁1茶匙、盐少许

皮馅料:

面粉500克、糖1汤匙、面包油100克、清水200 - 250克

做法:

1. 苹果削皮切片。净锅，用温火烧热，放入面包油，加入苹果片和白糖。煮20分钟后，加入肉桂粉，柠檬汁及盐拌匀。
2. 皮做法：将面粉、糖、面包油和清水搓成面团，待20分钟后才可用。将面团擀成薄片，各裁成适当的面积，包上馅料。
3. 放入热油，用温火炸成香脆。

The Merits of Producing Buddhist Teachings and Buddha Images

1. One's light karmic misgivings will dissolve, while heavy ones lighten.
2. One will be protected by devas, and be unharmed by natural and man-made disasters.
3. One will always be free from the suffering of hatred and vengeance.
4. One will be unharmed by 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 one becomes a Buddha.

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

Do you wish to offer this greatest gift to others, so that more can be touched by the beauty of the Dharma, and be inspired to lead happy and meaningful lives? If so, you can share in the production costs of AWAKEN Magazine for free distribution. Simply photocopy this page, fill in the sponsorship form and mail it back to us together with your cheque or money order. All cheques and money orders should be made payable to "Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery" and sent to:

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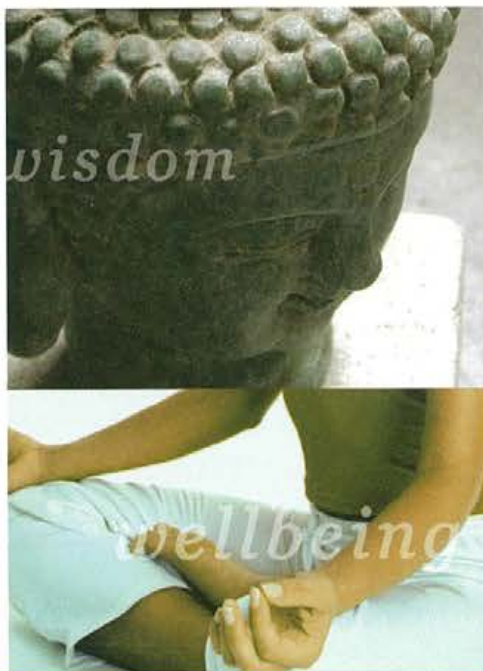
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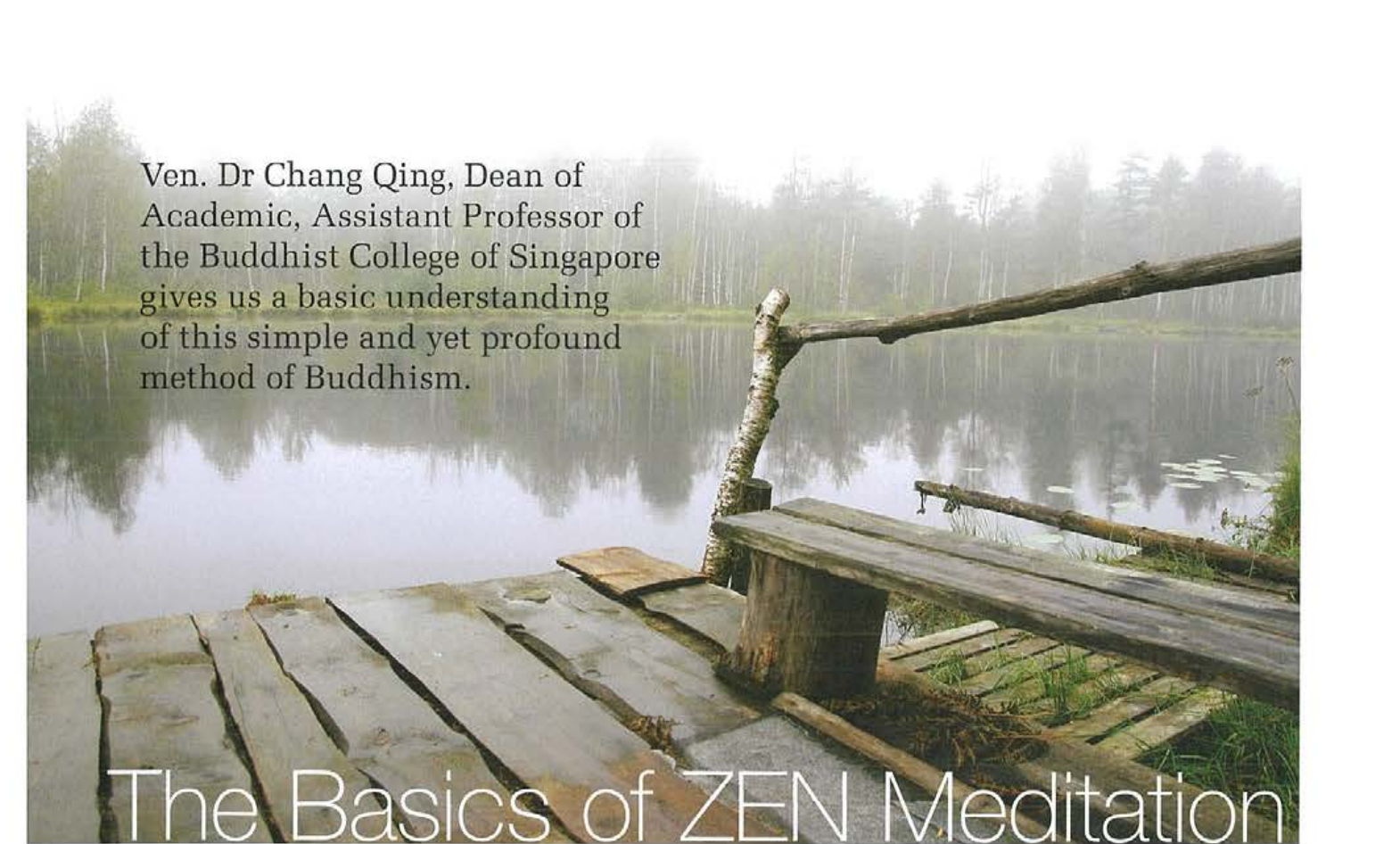
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Ven. Dr Chang Qing, Dean of Academic, Assistant Professor of the Buddhist College of Singapore gives us a basic understanding of this simple and yet profound method of Buddhism.

The Basics of ZEN Meditation

There are eight schools of thought that are institutionalised in Chinese Buddhism. However, Pure Land and Zen Buddhism are the more influential of the eight schools that more people around the world practise. In Buddhism, Pure Land is considered an “easy-path” (方便道) to attain enlightenment. Many Buddhists maintain the idea that this school of thought only emphasises on repeatedly chanting the name of Amitabha Buddha. Doing so, is tantamount to gaining entrance into the Pure Land when they finally perish from worldly life. Unfortunately, it is not as effortless as what they envisage. Before anyone can ascend to the Pure Land, some prerequisites have to be met. Similarly, Zen Buddhism also prevails everywhere. Let us focus our attention on “Zen meditation” (禅坐).

Zen and its many names

Zen meditation is known by many names. It is called *dhyana* in India, *Chan* (禅) in China and *Zen* in Japan. So what is so mystical about Zen? Zen signifies the elimination of evil and generation of merits. In *Ta-chi-tu-lun (Mahaprajna paramita-sastra)*, Zen is described as the “Practice of Contemplation”(思惟修). The new connotation is “Silent Deliberation” (静虑). One of the Buddhist treatises regarded Zen as the origin for non-arising of the deluded mind. In other

words, Zen could be deemed as pure-mind, wisdom, Dharma and truth.

In reality, “Zen meditation” (禅坐) and “Meditation” (静坐) are two very different entities. “Meditation” is akin to “pilates”. There are no underlying religious elements, and its main objective is to exercise the body and perhaps to cultivate mental health. In Buddhism, “Zen Meditation” is to practise the reflection of the Buddha’s teaching (Dharma) while meditating. Zen symbolises wisdom by contemplating the Dharma with meditation in order to generate wisdom. The above explanation spells out the crucial difference between the two kinds of meditation.

The purpose and function of Zen

According to Master Sheng Yen, the purpose of Zen is to neutralise the deluded mind.

In Buddhism, delusion is the main source of affliction and leads to worldly suffering.

External and internal objects are the main culprits of delusion. By practising Zen meditation, we could

harness wisdom so as to abandon delusion with the strength of concentration. For instance, by contemplating on impurity, we could defuse greed.

Zen meditation bestows many other advantages too. According to Master Sheng Yen, Zen meditation bestows three benefits. Firstly, it builds a strong and healthy body; secondly, an active brain; and thirdly a purified personality. The first two could be considered body wealth while the third is termed as Dharma wealth.

The Buddha had always reiterated the importance of human life. In the six realms, only humans have the capability to cultivate Dharma. It is for the same reason that Master Yin Shun advocated “Humanistic Buddhism” (人间佛教). In the book, *Zen Buddhism In the 20th Century*, Heinrich Dumoulin explained: “Zen meditation can be of therapeutic value both to the healthy and to those afflicted with bodily or mental ailments. No one is so healthy that his or her psychosomatic condition is completely undamaged.” Clearly, this statement explicitly defines the function of Zen meditation. At this point, we could say that Heinrich Dumoulin held the same view as Master Sheng Yen.

Right motivation & moderation

Zen meditation is gaining popularity everywhere. Many people practise it for various reasons. These reasons could range from curiosity, for relaxation, health and stress relief purposes to practising it with the aim of acquiring spiritual powers or to witness sages such as Buddha or Bodhisattva during meditation.

Practising it solely for the purpose of good health could be achieved by controlling one's breath. One does not induce oneself in any religious aspect in such practice. However, if the objective for practising the meditation is out of curiosity or to acquire spiritual powers, then it would not be acceptable from Buddhism's point of view.

This is because such motivation would lead to attachment to an external object which is a delusion. Buddhists who indulge themselves with such thoughts would display behaviour that others reckon as bizarre or abnormal. There are some Buddhists who go to such lengths that they spend their entire time on Zen meditation. They neglect daily matters

such as career, family, friends, voluntary work etc. In turn, this produces a negative impact on Buddhism. Such practice not only gives no benefit, at the same time it gives Buddhism a bad name. Thus, finding the right Zen meditation instructor is an important mission. He would possess the right attitude, pure motivation and the necessary experience to facilitate us in diminishing our problems which is indispensable for Zen meditation.

Inseparable from daily life

In the book, *The Essence of Zen*, Sekkei Harada enlightened: “Zazen can broadly be divided in two: Zen within activity and Zen within stillness. Zen within activity embraces the other activities in our daily life, such as our work and so forth. Zen within stillness is what we do in the *zendo*, the meditation hall.” Obviously, he was trying to convey the right message for the daily practice of Zen. Dharma cannot be separated and isolated from our daily life. Since Zen could be epitomised as wisdom, truth or Dharma, then it would be logical to say that Zen is an intimate part of our life. We should practise it diligently in all our daily activities. This is precisely what the Zen master meant by the “Zen in life”(生活禅).

In conclusion, we should realise now that Zen meditation is not just for bodily health. Most importantly, it is also for the maturity of our wisdom, and this should be our ultimate goal. Hence, we should not be overwhelmed by the meditation process and take it to the extreme. After every Zen meditation session, we should endeavour to practise Zen in our everyday activities without any strange abnormalities in our behaviour.

With this in mind, Zen Buddhism can have a positive development and impact on others. Needless to say, having a wholesome motive and knowing the profound implication of Zen are the two crucial factors in practising Zen meditation. ☺

Reference:

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Reaching Out, Crossing Boundaries

BY | Poh Yong Hui

As debate over the need for interfaith dialogue rages on at home, youth in Singapore have long participated actively in overseas interfaith exchanges — a nod in the right direction, perhaps?

But are such meetings — where delegates from different countries meet for three days to a week to discuss issues of global concern — able to effect any real change? Is it all work and no play? Who are the people most suitable to attend such dialogues?

Poh Yong Hui speaks to KMSPKS Youth Ministry staff, Cell Lim, Billy Loh and Renee Tan, who have all been on such exchanges both locally and abroad.

No man is an island. But would the world be a better place by having people from different cultures and faiths come together for a few days for such meetings?

Cell: Yes, the world would be a better place if the programmes for such gatherings are in-depth, well-planned and executed. It would be even better if they could inspire participants and organisers to share their learning experiences, thereby setting off multiple chain reactions in their individual circles of influence.

But no, the world would not be better if such gatherings are held for the sake of fulfilling quotas, with no clear learning objectives. If participants and organisers have no real interest in learning and sharing, and if nothing significant happens after it,



CELL LIM SIEW WEE, 28,
PROJECT COORDINATOR

Overseas interfaith events attended:
ASEM Youth Dialogue 2006, First Asia-Europe Youth Interfaith Dialogue, 19 to 23 November 2006, Navarra, Spain; Regional Youth Interfaith Forum 2007, 4 to 6 December 2007, Perth, Australia

BILLY LOH, 25,
PROGRAMME OFFICER



Overseas interfaith events attended:
The 2nd Asia-Europe Youth Interfaith Dialogue, 23 to 27 June 2008, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia



RENEE TAN, 20,
PROJECT COORDINATOR

Overseas interfaith events attended:
Asia-Pacific Interfaith Youth Camp, 27 to 31 July, Surabaya, Indonesia

such events would be a total waste of resources, time and money.

Renee: Yes, because it is during these few days that people will get to know one another better from face-to-face interaction. It allows us to understand the differences between our cultures and faiths to obtain mutual understanding. If we try to get along without a good understanding of one another's culture and faith, it is only



dialogue with panel speakers,
the 2nd Asia-Europe Youth
Interfaith Dialogue

(mutual) tolerance. There is always a limit to one's tolerance, but with understanding, it is easier to empathise with others.

In your experience, was the follow-up action after the dialogue (if any) able to effect any change?

Cell: A successful dialogue must have the component of "follow-up action" worked into it. Putting a dialogue together is quite a task, but to intentionally weave in plans to encourage or initiate follow-up actions is really a challenge. But it is do-able. Most of the dialogues I have attended, ended up with, at most, an informal network of people emailing one another on Facebook, Yahoo groups, MSN... and after a few months, such groups disappeared. Friendships do develop but it will take many years and suitable opportunities to see the benefits of such relationships.

Renee: After some time, the impetus to action will slowly die down, but the individual will have to continue with their own follow-up action instead of depending on a group effort.

What are the three most important things a delegate should bring, and why?

Billy: Our knowledge and experience: I make an effort to update myself with current affairs. This eases me into conversations with delegates, And

as a Buddhist representative, I shared about how Buddhism has helped me in my daily life. It helps to build interfaith understanding of one another.

Our sincerity: Be true to yourself and others, and they will be true to you, too.

Our smiles: The delegates remembered me as "friendly, fun and knowledgeable". This created a good impression of a young Buddhist from Singapore to the delegates.

Renee: Bring an open mind and name cards to give out!

Cell: Have an open heart to share your experiences; an open mind to learn from others. Make full use of your time to interact and chat with youth from different countries and faiths.

Have the confidence to share with others about your faith but be sensitive and sensible. After all, it's an interfaith dialogue!

Have some simple gifts or souvenirs to give to fellow youth and organisers on the last day!

Renee, the Indonesians are famed for their friendliness. Was there anything else about your hosts that struck you strongly?



Billy (First from left) with Fellow Singaporean delegates in Bandung, Indonesia



Renee (second from right) with organisers of the dialogue and fellow Singaporean delegates

Renee: My hosts were of upper-middle class status and owned a salon and a restaurant, but they were humble and treated everyone with respect. They did not discriminate against others because they were richer, or spoke harshly to their workers when the latter did something wrong – instead, they would patiently correct their workers and still appreciate their workers' efforts.

Overseas interfaith dialogues are not 'all work and no play'. Any memorable incidents to share?

Cell: That must be the dialogue in Spain 2006. My working group had to contribute to a declaration addressed to multiple governments on what the mass media industry should observe while reporting on religious issues. It was very difficult to steer the discussion in the right direction and pin down what was appropriate. Firstly, we had no idea what a declaration was and how it should look like. Secondly, the discussion was dominated by friends from the Middle East with their concerns about free media, friends from Europe who insisted on the freedom of speech and of course us Asians nodding our heads to both sides. We still managed to squeeze a draft out but it was very amateurish. Then half an hour before our presentation, I grabbed a couple of people in the group, convinced them that it was not appropriate, realigned everyone and did an

overhaul to our draft. It worked and we produced a decent final declaration!

Renee: The most memorable activity was a night trek up a mountain in Surabaya. It was my first time trekking at night. Although it was a long, tiring and cold trek, we had fun singing, cheering and encouraging each other. It took us more than four hours and the sight of the campfire was so welcoming. After warming ourselves before the fire, we only had a few hours of sleep before waking up at 5.30am to catch the sunrise. Watching the sunrise on a mountain surrounded by the howling winds was an amazing experience.

Have overseas interfaith dialogues changed you in any way?

Cell: Definitely yes! It was an eye opener for me, to see that there were so many capable religious youth leaders across the globe keen on interfaith dialogues. In contrast, Singapore has only just begun the process of getting youth interested in such matters, hence you do not get to see many youth in interfaith work. It is therefore encouraging for me to meet like-minded youths from all around the world.

It made me realise that Singapore is still many steps away from organising our own international interfaith dialogue for youth. In order to be a good host, we need the full support of related government bodies, existing networks with peers from strategic countries, and a substantial group of youth with hands-on experience in interfaith work and knowledge of current affairs with a religious perspective.



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Right View — the Place of Coolness

BY I Ajahn Chah

The practice of Dhamma (Dharma) goes against our habits, the truth goes against our desires, so there is difficulty in the practice. Some things which we understand as wrong may be right, while the things we take to be right may

be wrong. Why is this? Because our minds are in darkness, we don't clearly see the Truth. We don't really know anything and so are fooled by people's lies. They point out what is right as being wrong and we believe it; that which is wrong, they say is right, and we believe that. This is because we are not yet our own masters. Our moods lie to us constantly. We shouldn't take this mind and its opinions as our guide, because it doesn't know the truth.

Some people don't want to listen to others at all, but this is not the way of a man of wisdom. A wise man listens to everything. One who listens to Dhamma

must listen just the same, whether he likes it or not, and not blindly believe or disbelieve. He must stay at the half-way mark, the middle point, and not be heedless. He just listens and then contemplates, giving rise to the right results accordingly.

A wise man should contemplate and see the cause and effect for himself before he believes what he hears. Even if the teacher speaks the truth, don't just believe it, because you don't yet know the truth of it for yourself.

It's the same for all of us, including myself. I've

practised before you, I've seen many lies before. For instance, "This practice is really difficult, really hard." Why is the practice difficult? It's just because we think wrongly, we have the wrong view. Previously I lived together with other monks, but I didn't feel right. I ran away to the forests and mountains, fleeing the crowd, the monks and novices. I thought that they weren't like me. They didn't practise as hard as I did. They were sloppy. That person was like this, this person was like that. This was something that really put me in turmoil. Such views were the cause for my continually running away. But whether I lived alone or with others, I still had no peace. On my own I wasn't content, in a large group I wasn't content. I thought this discontent was due to my companions, due to my moods, due to my living condition, the food, the weather, due to this and that. I was constantly searching for something to suit my mind.

As a *dhutanga* monk, I went travelling, but things still weren't right. So I contemplated, "What can I do to make things right? What can I do?" Living with a lot of people I was dissatisfied, with few people I was dissatisfied. For what reason? I just couldn't see it. Why was I dissatisfied? Because I had the wrong view, just that; because I still clung to the wrong Dhamma. Wherever I went I was discontent, thinking, "Here is no good, there is no good..." on and on like that. I blamed others. I blamed the weather, heat and cold, I blamed everything! Just like a mad dog. It bites whatever it meets, because it's mad. When the mind is like this our practice is never settled. Today we feel good, tomorrow no good. It's like that all the time. We don't attain contentment or peace.

The Buddha once saw a jackal, a wild dog, run out of the forest where he was staying. It stood still for a while, then it ran into the underbrush, and then out again. Then it ran into a tree hollow, then out again. Then it went into a cave, only to run out again. One minute it stood, the next it ran, then it lay down, then it jumped up. That jackal had mange. When it stood, the mange would eat into its skin, so it would run. Running it was still uncomfortable, so it would stop. Standing was still uncomfortable, so it would lie down. Then it would jump up again, running into the underbrush or the tree hollow, and never staying still.

The Buddha said, "Monks, did you see that jackal

this afternoon? Standing it suffered, running it suffered, sitting it suffered, lying down it suffered. In the underbrush, a tree hollow or a cave, it suffered. It blamed standing for its discomfort, it blamed sitting, it blamed running and lying down; it blamed the tree, the underbrush and the cave. In fact the problem was with none of those things. That jackal had mange. The problem was with the mange.

We monks are just the same as that jackal. Our discontent is due to the wrong view. Because we don't exercise sense restraint we blame our suffering on externals. Whether we live at Wat Pah Pong, in America or in London we aren't satisfied. Going to live at Bung Wai or any of the other branch monasteries we're still not satisfied. Why not? Because we still have the wrong view within us. Wherever we go we aren't content.

But just as that dog, if the mange is cured, is content wherever it goes, so it is for us. I reflect on this often, and I teach you this often, because it's very important. If we know the truth of our various moods we arrive at contentment. Whether it's hot or cold we are satisfied, with many people or with few people we are satisfied.

Contentment doesn't depend on how many people we are with, it comes only from right view. If we have right view then wherever we stay we are content.

But most of us have the wrong view. It's just like a maggot — a maggot's living place is filthy, its food is filthy...but they suit the maggot. If you take a stick and brush it away from its lump of dung, it'll struggle to crawl back in. It's the same when the *Ajahn* teaches us to see rightly. We resist, it makes us feel uneasy. We run back to our 'lump of dung' because that's where we feel at home. We're all like this. If we don't see the harmful consequences of all our wrong views then we can't leave them, the practice is difficult. So we should listen. There's nothing else to the practice.

If we have right view wherever we go we are content. I have practised and seen this already. These days there are many monks, novices and lay people coming to see me. If I still didn't know, if I still had

the wrong view, I'd be dead by now! The right abiding place for monks, the place of coolness, is just right view itself. We shouldn't look for anything else.

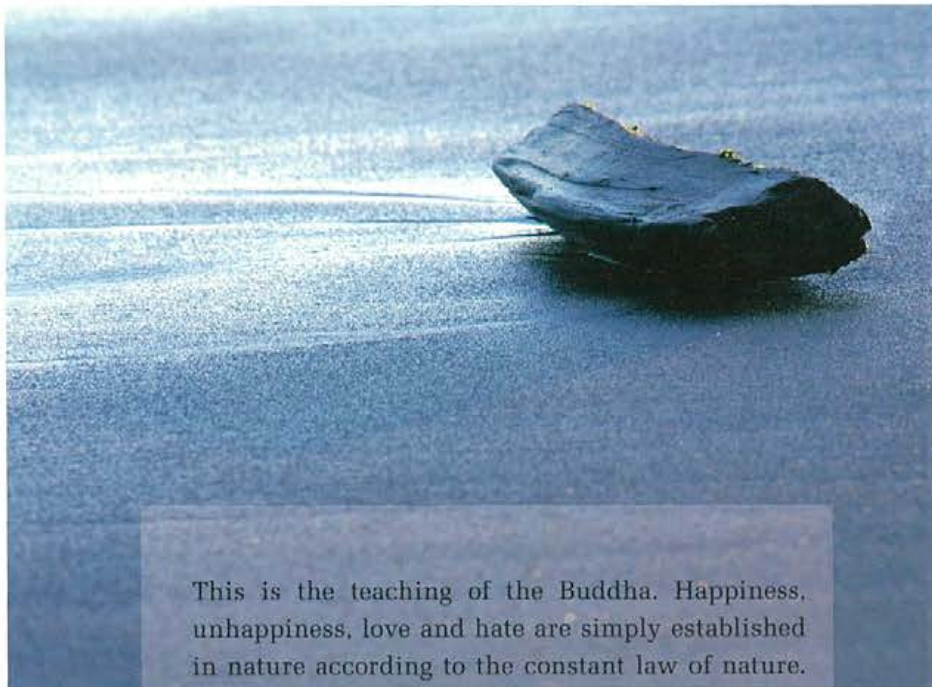
So even though you may be unhappy it doesn't matter, that unhappiness is uncertain. Is that unhappiness your 'self'? Is there any substance to it? Is it real? I don't see it as being real at all. Unhappiness is merely a flash of feeling which appears and then is gone. Happiness is the same. Is there a consistency to happiness? Is it truly an entity? It's simply a feeling that flashes suddenly and is gone. There! It's born and then it dies. Love just flashes up for a moment and then disappears. Where is the consistency in love, or hate, or resentment? In truth there is no substantial entity there, they are merely impressions which flare up in the mind and then die. They deceive us constantly, we find no certainty anywhere.

Just as the Buddha said, when unhappiness arises it stays for a while, then disappears. When unhappiness disappears, happiness arises and lingers for a while and then dies. When happiness disappears, unhappiness arises again...on and on like this.

In the end we can say only this — apart from the birth, the life and the death of suffering, there is nothing. There is just this. But we who are ignorant run and grab it constantly. We never see the truth of it, that there's simply this continual change. If we understand this then we don't need to think very much, but we have much wisdom. If we don't know it, then we will have more thinking than wisdom — and maybe no wisdom at all!

It's not until we truly see the harmful results of our actions that we can give them up. Likewise, it's not until we see the real benefits of practice that we can follow it, and begin working to make the mind 'good'.

If we cut a log of wood and throw it into the river, and that log doesn't sink or rot, or run aground on either of the banks of the river, that log will definitely reach the sea. Our practice is comparable to this. If you practise according to the path laid down by the Buddha, following it straightly, you will transcend two things. What two things? Just those two extremes that the Buddha said were not the path of a true meditator — indulgence in pleasure and indulgence in pain. These are the two banks of the river. One of the banks of that river is hate, the other is love. Or you can say that one bank is happiness, the other unhappiness. The 'log' is this mind. As it 'flows down the river' it will experience happiness and unhappiness. If the mind doesn't cling to that happiness or unhappiness it will reach the 'ocean' of Nibbāna. You should see that there is nothing other than happiness and unhappiness arising and disappearing. If you don't 'run aground' on these things then you are on the path of a true meditator.

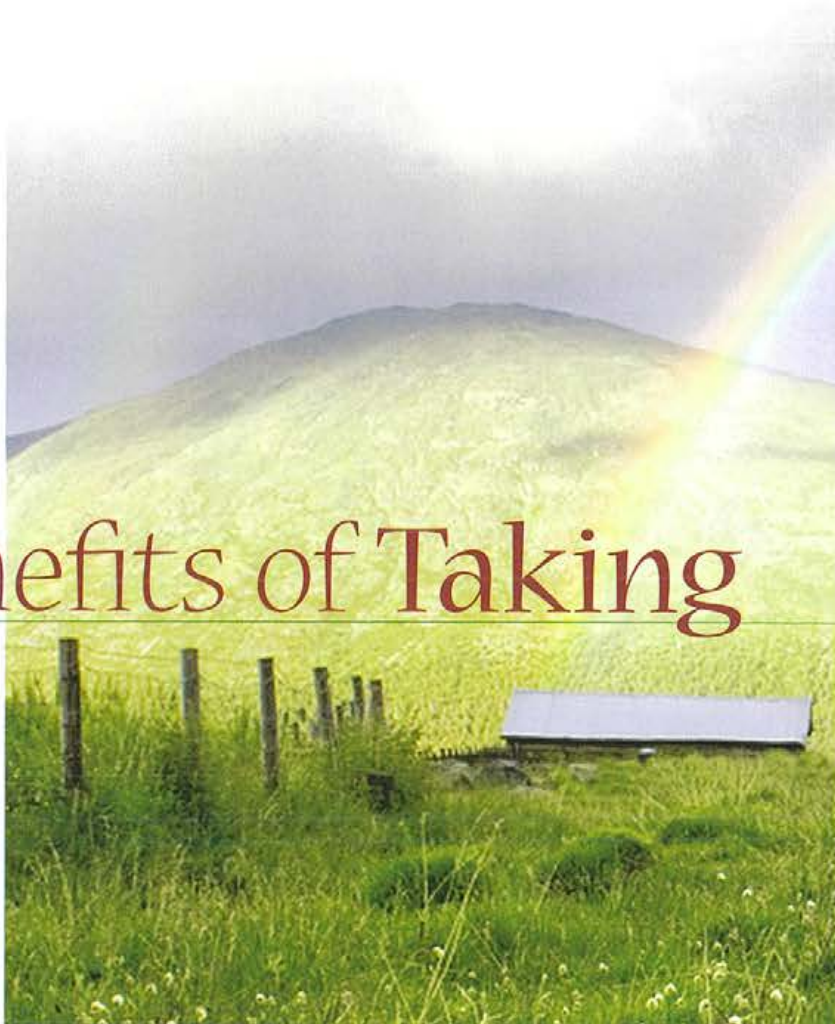


This is the teaching of the Buddha. Happiness, unhappiness, love and hate are simply established in nature according to the constant law of nature.

The wise person doesn't follow or encourage them, he doesn't cling to them. This is the mind which lets go of indulgence in pleasure and indulgence in pain. It is the right practice. Just as that log of wood will eventually flow to the sea, so will the mind which doesn't attach to these two extremes inevitably attain peace. 🌀

*This article is extracted from **The Teachings of Ajahn Chah** (www.ajahnchah.org). Copyright The Sangha, Wat Nong Pah Pong.*

From ancient times to the present, the taking of refuge has functioned as the entranceway to the teaching of the Buddha. Let Ven. Thubten Chodron tell you more.



The Benefits of Taking

We Become Buddhists

The first benefit is we become Buddhists. You may say, “What is so great about becoming a Buddhist? I

am already a member of this club and that club and that other club, what do I need another membership card for?” Becoming a Buddhist is not joining a club and getting a membership card. Rather it means that we are starting on the path to enlightenment. So, one of the benefits of taking refuge is that it initiates us onto the path to enlightenment. Of course we can create good karma without taking refuge and you can be doing practices that are beneficial to yourself, but the meaning of becoming a Buddhist is that you are actually stepping onto the path that the Buddhas follow. You are trying to go in that same direction that the Buddha went.

This can bring up the whole subject of, “Well, is Buddhism the only path that is going to lead you to enlightenment?” Here’s another example that might help to illustrate this point. For instance, there are many roads from here that will take you downtown. There is more than one way to go downtown. You can drive a long way. You can drive a short way. You can go on the highway or you can go on the side streets. But not every road that you take from here where we are now will lead you downtown. We tend to go to extremes of saying, “It’s got to be Buddhist and if you are not a Buddhist you are going to hell.” That is completely erroneous. On the other hand, thinking in the other extreme and saying, “Everything is the same and all religions are the same,” is like saying you can drive any direction that you want from here on Fifty-Fourth Street and you will end up downtown. But that is not true, because if you drive north from here you will end up in Vancouver and not downtown! So I think we have to use our discriminating wisdom and not get hung up on words and labels – that is not important, but we do have to look at the meaning and what is going on.



Refuge

We Need to Be Astute

When we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha we are saying that we have examined the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, know something about the path, have confidence in it and decide that this is the direction that we want to go.

There may be other teachings that are very good. All religions have something good in them. All religions exist to bring human happiness. By taking refuge, however, we are declaring that this particular system is something that speaks to our heart. We have confidence in it, are going to follow it and therefore we make a clear decision in our lives. I think that is important.

We Settle Down to One Path

I am always talking about the example of someone studying crystals on Monday night and holistic healing on Tuesday night, etc. We can continue to do that. There is no pressure to take refuge. It is our own spiritual practice; we are the ones that are responsible. But at some point we might actually want to find one principal direction and settle down and devote ourselves to that.

For instance, when you are young you date a lot of guys, but at a certain point you will probably get married. It is like you get tired of going out with all these different guys, so you think marriage might be better. Of course, marriage brings a whole new set of headaches, but you do have the opportunity to go deeply into the relationship that way. Well, marriage here is analogous to taking refuge. Becoming a Buddhist and taking refuge does not mean you do not learn about crystals and holistic healing anymore. You can still learn about those things, but you have your principal priority designated and that cuts out the confusion just as getting married cuts out the confusion of fifty million guys. But taking refuge does bring you some new headaches initially because you have to start looking at your mind.

We Begin to Purify

It is not that Buddhism brings headaches to us, but sometimes the idea of commitment to one path can make a lot of stuff come up in our life because that is when we really begin the process of purification.

When we begin to purify, all of our junk comes up. When we begin to meditate, we have to look at what is in our mind. Whereas when we go from one spiritual thing, to the next and to others, it is like we are in a spiritual amusement park, getting amused by all the external things, so of course we do not look at our mind. But when we take refuge, we have to start looking at our mind. That is why I say practising is like living in a garbage dump initially. But

there is hope. I firmly believe that it is possible to transform the garbage dump into something better, but we have to start at where we are.

If we do not take refuge, even though we may create a lot of good karma, that karma will not be dedicated for the attainment of enlightenment, because we have no faith in enlightenment and no faith in the Buddhist path.

So this first step of making a commitment, becoming a Buddhist, entering into the Buddhist path, really clarifies where we are going. Then when we create good karma we can dedicate it for the attainment of enlightenment. Whereas, if we do not really have much confidence in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, we may create good karma but we will not dedicate it for the attainment of enlightenment because if you do not believe in enlightenment, why would you dedicate the good karma for that?



We Establish the Foundation For Taking All Further Vows

The next benefit of taking refuge is that it establishes a foundation for taking all further vows. The reason for this is that taking refuge confirms in us that we want to attain liberation. Taking refuge confirms that we want to follow the path set out by the Buddha and thus having confirmed that, it sets the stage so that we can actually take the different levels of precepts or vows that can help us accumulate good karma and help us abandon our habitual confused behaviour.

Also, if your refuge is very strong you will keep your vows well. If your refuge is not very strong, then you will not keep your vows well. If you have not taken refuge, then you will not follow the precepts. If

you do not believe in the path and the goal that the Buddha explained, you will not follow the method to get there.

Three Sets of Vows

Refuge serves as the foundation for taking any further vows or initiations. There are actually three sets of vows that one can take as a Buddhist. The first level is called *pratimoksha* or individual liberation vows. These include the five lay precepts, the monks and nun's vows and also one-day vows. The second type of vows is called the *bodhisattva* vows. The third type is the *tantric* vows. These are

in order of how easy or difficult it is to keep them. In other words, the individual liberation vows are the easiest to keep because they point out physical and verbal behaviours that are to be abandoned. The *bodhisattva* vows are more difficult to keep because they point out mental behaviours to be abandoned, as do the *tantric* vows which are even more difficult to keep.

Nowadays, because initiations are given very freely, sometimes people's first exposure to Buddhism is through an initiation. They might say something like, "I've taken this and that initiation but I am not a Buddhist." Actually, refuge vows are given as part of the initiation ceremony, but if the person does not consider himself a Buddhist then he has not taken

the *bodhisattva* vows or the *tantric* vows. And if you have not taken those, you have not taken the initiation. So people may say they have taken an initiation, they may think they have and that's okay, there is nothing wrong with saying that or thinking that, but if one has not taken refuge in one's heart either in a separate ceremony or in the earlier part of that initiation, then one really has not taken an initiation.

Refuge Vows are the Door

That is why taking refuge is the door to the Buddha's teachings. It is the doorway that you enter into to be able to commit yourself to any of the further practices. Like I repeatedly say, somebody can learn Buddha's teachings and practise them without being a Buddhist. If something the Buddha taught helps your life, practise it. It does not matter if you have taken refuge or not.

But now when we talk about taking refuge we are talking of actually settling down and getting into the path and doing it. It is a different level of involvement. The advantage of taking refuge is that you get to take precepts. You are probably going, "Ugh, I get to take precepts. Who wants to take precepts! When I take the one-day *Mahayana* precepts, I can only eat one meal a day. I can't sing and dance. I can't have sex. I can't do this. I can't do that. Why is this an advantage?" Well that shows us something about what we think is important in life.

The advantage of taking precepts is that it acts as a framework for us to become more mindful, more aware of what we are saying, thinking and doing. If you take a precept to do, or not do, something that has been in your mind all day, you become much more aware of what is going on instead of just being on automatic mode. Taking precepts is very beneficial that way. Also, by keeping the precepts, we continually create good karma no matter what we are doing as long as we are not directly breaking the precepts.

There is a refuge ceremony for people who wish to take refuge. When you take refuge, you automatically take the precept not to kill. In addition, if people want to take any of the other precepts at that time they may, because taking refuge gives one the ability to take the five lay precepts for one's life and one gets all the advantages of taking the precepts.

We Can Eliminate Results of Previously Accumulated Negative Karma

The third advantage of taking refuge is that it helps us to eliminate the negative karmic imprints on our mindstream. Previously in our confusion we may have acted destructively in verbal, physical and mental ways. We have those imprints on our mind and they will bring consequences. Taking refuge helps us because if we take refuge, we take vows, and observing the vows helps us to purify our past negative karma.

If we take refuge, we are also more likely to do the other practices that help us to purify, like doing the four opponent powers and doing purification meditation. Also if we take refuge, we have a deeper connection with the Buddha and by making offerings, doing prostrations and so forth to the Buddha, this also helps to purify our negative karma, because we are generating very positive attitudes when we are doing these practices.

Taking refuge can be a very strong purification of all the different karmas that we have created.

We Can Quickly Accumulate Great Positive Karma

Offerings to the Buddha

The next benefit of taking refuge is that it enables us to create a vast store of positive potential for very similar reasons. In other words, if we take refuge then we are more likely to engage in the practices that are going to create positive potential in our lives. Also when we take refuge, because of the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, they become very strong objects for us with which to create karma because of their qualities. If we make offerings to the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, we create a very strong, powerful karma compared to making an offering to our best friend, unless your best friend is a Buddha!

In other words, according to the level of a person's spiritual realisations, the qualities they have and their relationship to us, we create karma. Some people and some things are heavier objects karmically for us than others. The Buddha, Dharma, Sangha are heavy because of their qualities.

If we have taken refuge and are prompted to make prostrations or offerings or serve the Buddhist community in some way, then because of the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and because they are very strong objects with which we create karma, we create a lot of good karma through our prostrations, offerings and so on.

This is because the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha have the qualities that they do, any way in which we help them, becomes us helping all other sentient beings because the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are working for the benefit of all those sentient beings. This means if you help the Buddha and help people

who are working for the benefit of other sentient beings, as you help them, they in turn help a huge array of people. ☸

Threefold Refuge; Five Precepts Ceremony

Refuge Master: Abbot, Ven. Sik Kwang Sheng

Date/Time: 15 March 2009, 12.30pm

Threefold Refuge; Five Precepts Preparation Class

Date/Time: 1 Mar, 8 Mar, 22 Mar, 29 Mar 09,
9.30am – 11.30am

Venue: KMSPKS, Dharma Hall

Details: A 4-session course focusing on the benefits, merits of taking Threefold Refuge & Five Precepts, and the ways of integrating Precepts into our daily life

For more information or to register, please call 6849 5300.

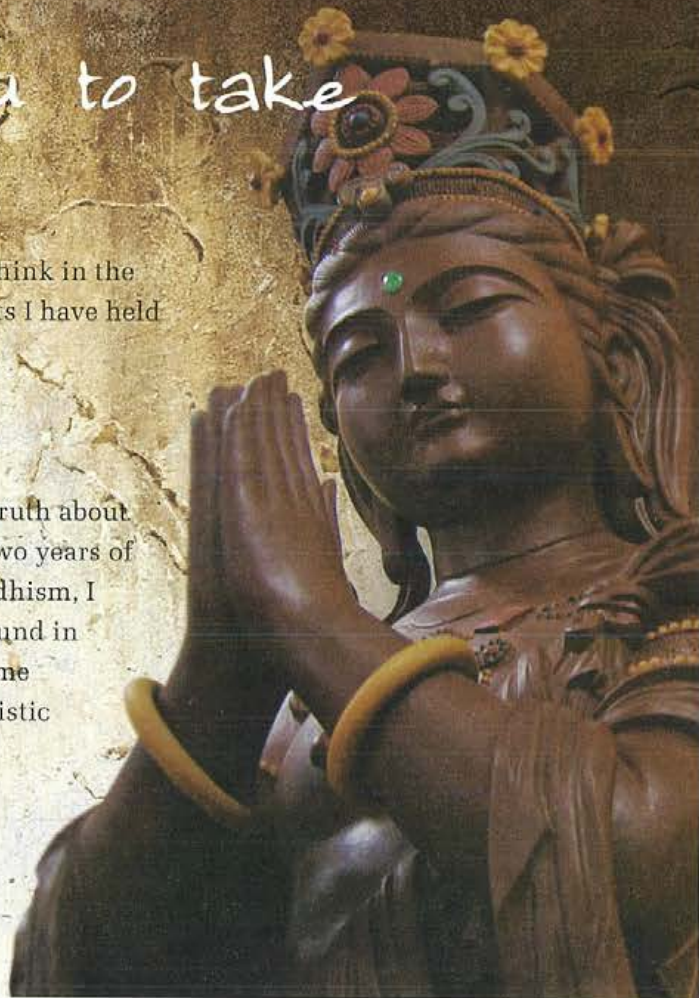
What spurred you to take refuge?

"It is the change of mindset, starting to learn how to think in the Buddha's way and to abandon all those wrong concepts I have held for countless number of lives!"

— Chan Sau Siong, 34, TCM physician

"It started from the curiosity of wanting to know the truth about life and the universe when I was at university. After two years of studying psychology, Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, I became acutely aware that all my answers could be found in the teachings of the Buddha. Taking refuge has made me more determined to lead a more meaningful and altruistic way of life based on the Buddha's teachings."

— H.Y Yan, 30s, Teacher



WE ARE ONE WITH THE UNIVERSE

I was in my early teens then. Travelling on a public bus one day, it suddenly occurred to me that as I was thinking: “I am now travelling on a bus”, the same thought might also be running through the minds of fellow travellers who were on that same bus.

At that moment, I had this curious thought that if I could be thinking: “I am *me*”, so could the people sitting next to me, in front of me, behind me, and everyone else. Everyone in his own mind could be thinking: “I am *me*”. It then led me to think: “So, who am I?”

Till this day, I still remember vividly that such a thought had flashed past my mind at that tender age. Over the years, as I gained some exposure to the teachings in Buddhism, I began to realise that my experience on the public bus was a simple yet profound encounter with the realisation that “we are one with the universe”. The notion of “*I, me, mine*” are self-created.

I vaguely recall a comic strip in a Buddhist book or newsletter I once read many years ago. The comic depicted a large wave hitting the shore of a beach. The large wave was made up of many smaller waves who were talking to one another, as though each of the smaller waves were individuals. That picture is an excellent illustration of what “we are one with the universe” means.

Each of us is like one of the smaller waves, each thinking of ourselves as an individual separate from

the others around us. However, like the smaller waves who are all part of the larger wave, we are all individuals who are part of the larger universe.

It is not difficult to understand this. Imagine taking a helicopter ascending into the sky. At ground level, we can see those around us very clearly. As we ascend upwards, we would begin to see many other people below, who would increasingly seem smaller and smaller. The higher we go, the tinier the people on the ground would seem. From that perspective, it becomes clear that we are nothing but tiny specks that are part of the larger universe.

I like to think of the analogy that a community of human beings is not very much different from a colony of ants. To the colony of ants, the entire kitchen might be what they thought wrongly to be their “universe” — being so tiny, they might not be cognizant of the fact that besides the kitchen, there is also the living room, the bedrooms, or further away, there are also other neighbouring houses. Being so engrossed in activities such as searching for food or running away from bigger insects, they might not realise just how tiny they are compared to their surroundings. The same goes for human beings.

Whatever happiness and joy, or challenges and difficulties we might encounter in our daily lives, they are but minute events compared to the larger universe. When we see things from that perspective, it makes us realise that the difficult moments we might encounter in our lives are as transient as the passing clouds; so are the happy moments.

What is important therefore, is for us to live every moment with inner peace and tranquillity as best as we can. It is not easy, but we should try our best, and constantly remind ourselves about it. For it is our own responsibility to train ourselves to treasure every happy moment as they arise, and to be resilient when adversities occur.

Most importantly, it is our responsibility to learn, practise and internalise Buddhist teachings, so that they would guide us in our daily encounters. 🌸





BY | Ng Pei Fuen

To Face Ageing (Jara)

Today, I had a 14-hour crash course about ageing (jara).

My grandmother suffered a dislocation in her right arm, with slight fracture. From 8.00 this morning, the whole household was busy, and waiting. First, we had to wait for the Chinese physician to make a house call, then we waited for my aunt to bring the wheelchair over. Next, we had a frenzy transporting a very delicate grandma to get an X-ray done, followed by more waiting for the X-ray report to be faxed to the Chinese physician.

Then we waited some more for the Chinese physician to come back from his lunch break, and afterwards were busy over deciding what to do next. We waited at the A&E for the first doctor; then the second and the third doctors. We waited for my grandma's arm to be fixed; we waited to do the admission procedures; we waited for the nurse to take grandma to her ward;

we waited for the doctors to come; we waited for my uncle to come visit; we waited and waited.... and finally at 2215hours we reached home.

What struck me most out of this 14-hour episode was the word "AGEING" and its implications.

"The body cannot be a refuge. It is not dependable"

How did the dislocation happen? My grandma merely reached out her right arm to support herself to stand. "Cluck"! And she winced in pain. The arm had come out of position. There was no fall. There was no warning.

"Emotional helplessness and fear"

Within 30 minutes after the dislocation, my grandmother continuously droned, "Old already, no use. I think I better stay in the hospital like the last time. The missy can take care of me at night. It's troublesome to go to the toilet. If I stayed at home, sure will bring trouble to you. Better to stay in the hospital for a few days. I may fall again at home."

Considering the fact that this was my grandma's second dislocation in a year of experiencing three falls with blood spilt, the phobia of losing control of her body and the pain that follows haunts her constantly.

As I sat waiting outside A&E, I read an article by Venerable Khemmadhammo on "responding to pain". This particular paragraph stood out for my own contemplation:

"...by all means take care of your body, but reflect that whatever you do it may still be easily broken and one day it is sure to die. Of the two, a healthy mind is of much more use than a healthy body. If you're in wondrous physical shape, but your mind is disordered, you're in bad trouble. But if your body is wasted, eaten up by disease or otherwise beyond repair, and your mind is bright with wisdom, you'll be all right."

I appreciated that timely reminder, and at that moment, my eyes were tired. So I decided to act on the advice, dwelling on compassion (karuna) as an object of meditation with my grandmother in mind. I diligently kept her face in my mind, repeating 'may you be free from suffering'.... as I kept on thus, I reflected that there was nothing I could really do for her. Slowly, the image of her face gave way to her skeleton... all bent over... and for the first time, I saw that the bones in the skeleton were brittle.. they were on the edge of breaking, even at the slightest touch! They were not the solid, hard and dependable matter (rupa) that I used to discern when I focused on the skeleton within myself.

Today, I learnt that even the skeleton, the hardest part of our body, what I always reflect as 'holding up' or 'framing' the body can also give way. And it can give way very easily. How fragile it was, I thought. I kept my mind focused on that set of bent over, brittle bones that represented my grandma.

When I opened my eyes, I saw people with broken legs in casts being wheeled around by friends and relatives, a broken arm here and broken legs there... how fragile this body is! Even the hardest part is so easily fractured, broken and prone to giving way. I've always reflected on the bones as repulsive, but solid. Today, I learnt that they are also fragile.

Bones are so fragile. Life is also very fragile. Our untrained mind is also very fragile.

We cannot stop our body from ageing and falling apart no matter how much effort we put into caring it through exercise, having a balanced diet, popping nutritional supplements, taking up health insurance, and practising chanting and meditation. It happens.

But what we can do is to train our mind to accept and prepare for such an inevitable happening here and now. For me, today was a reminder that brought this teaching of ageing close to my heart. I am not immune from ageing. I will age. Ageing spoils this body. Let it not spoil my mind. Let me use this body while it stands, let it help me cultivate while it lasts to have more love, more kindness, more compassion and wisdom. When it decides to stop working, we've lost our vehicle for enlightenment in this life.

I never know when it will fall apart. So let me strive on diligently now, and every moment that I have towards the path of liberation. Let me have compassion and patience to others who have already come to this stage. When I look at them, I see myself. They are me.

Let me develop the courage and honesty to face AGEING upfront; not avoiding it; not cheating myself; not thinking that I'm any exception.

This body is not dependable. It cannot be a safe refuge. Let my only refuge be with the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Till the day I attain Nirvana, I take firm refuge in the Triple Gem. 🙏

THE GUIDE

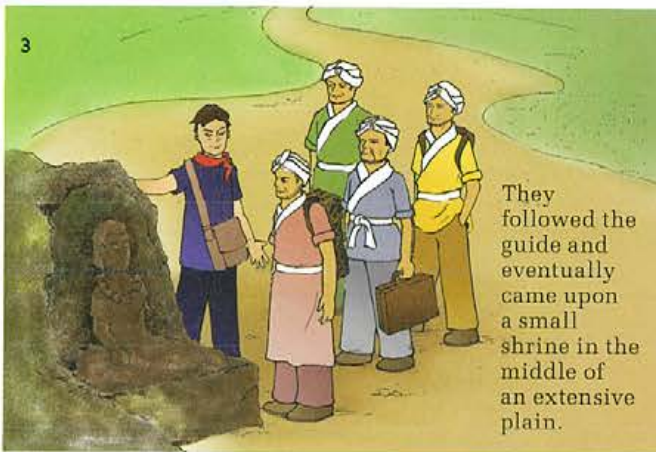
ADAPTED BY | Esther Thien ILLUSTRATIONS | Bee Li



1 Long, long ago, some merchants decided to journey across the sea. However, they needed a guide to help them find their way to the distant harbour. So they set out to search for one.



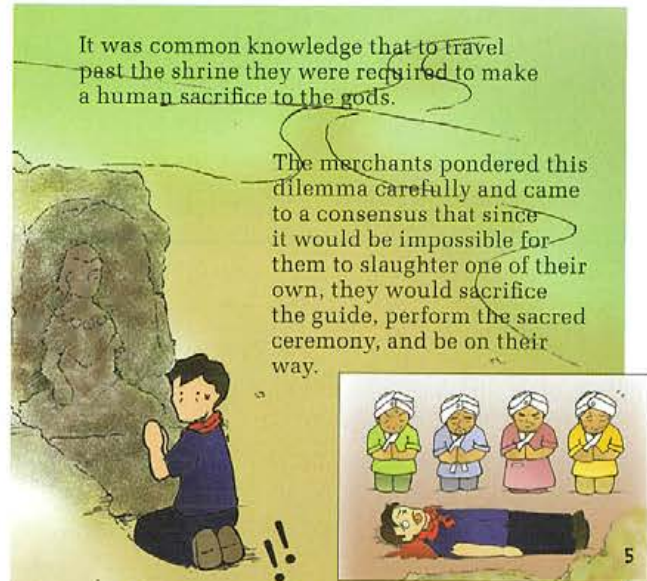
2 After some time, they managed to hire the services of a well-respected guide and thus started their journey.



3 They followed the guide and eventually came upon a small shrine in the middle of an extensive plain.

Many people are like this. They want to enter the Dharma ocean and obtain its precious treasures. To achieve that, they should practise wholesome deeds and make these deeds their guide. Instead, they sacrifice the virtuous deeds and hence could never achieve liberation from the unending cycle of birth and death. Helplessly, they wander in the three lower realms, like the travelling merchants who wanted to cross the great ocean but slaughtered their guide and so were unable to reach their destination. In the end, they perished from their ignorant act.

~ story adapted from The One Hundred Parable Sutra



It was common knowledge that to travel past the shrine they were required to make a human sacrifice to the gods.

The merchants pondered this dilemma carefully and came to a consensus that since it would be impossible for them to slaughter one of their own, they would sacrifice the guide, perform the sacred ceremony, and be on their way.



When they had finished the ritual, they resumed their journey, but because there was no longer anyone to guide them, they didn't know which route to take.



It wasn't long before they lost their way completely and perished without ever reaching the harbour they had sought.

THE OLD MONK

ADAPTED BY | Esther Thien

Once upon a time, there was a very old man who was ordained a monk when he was pretty advanced in age. He did not know any Dharma. One day, a woman went up to him. She gave him an offering of a very stunning piece of textile and asked him for some Dharma teaching.

The old monk became anxious for he did not know any Dharma to teach her. However, as he was given an offering, it was necessary for him to say something. So thinking out aloud, he said, "It is because of my ignorance that I am suffering."

The woman thought to herself that what he meant was that all suffering arise in the world due to the cause of Ignorance. She contemplated carefully and concluded that what he said was very good. Hence, she meditated upon that and was able to understand the first truth of suffering, and achieved great insight.

News travelled and soon many people heard about her offering of the beautiful cloth, including a robber. He coveted it and wanted it for himself. So he went to the monk's house and stood at the door asking for the cloth. Frightened, the old monk said, "Go to the side of the window if you want it." The thief did as he was told. He sauntered to the side of the window and juttied one of his hands in. "Now give me that cloth," he said gruffly.

The old monk replied, "When this piece of cloth was offered to me, it was given with both hands. So if you want it, extend both hands and I will give it to you."

As soon as the robber did as he was told, the old monk bound his hands with a rope and tied them to a pillar in the house. Then he went out, took a stick and started beating the thief very strongly. With every stroke that he delivered, he would recite one verse of the refuge prayer: "I go to the Buddha for refuge, I go to the Dharma for refuge, I go to the Sangha for refuge." He continued whacking and

reciting the refuge prayer until the robber's legs were nearly broken. He howled in great pain and finally the old monk let him go.

The robber hobbled off as fast as he could to get away from the old monk. Someone saw him hobbling and asked him why he was limping. The robber replied that he was trying to rob the old monk of the beautiful cloth but was instead caught and beaten up. He also recounted how the old monk recited the refuge prayer while walloping him, and said that the Buddha was very great because the entire refuge prayer comprised of three lines. Had the Buddha made it longer, he would be dead by then.

Now, the robber had the habit of dwelling underneath a bridge. During the night, many non-humans such as spirits would cross that bridge. However, one night when they went up to the bridge, they couldn't cross it. They felt a strong force holding them back and preventing them from getting across. They were curious and began to search around for the cause. They found the robber underneath the bridge mumbling. When they asked him what he was mumbling, he answered that he was reciting the prayer of taking refuge in the Triple Gem.

"How great and powerful indeed is the Triple Gem to be able to stop us from crossing the bridge," thought the spirits and unseen beings to themselves. Thus they decided to take refuge in the Triple Gem. It is said that by the power of taking refuge in the Triple Gem, these beings were able to gain rebirth in the higher realms.

The robber, on the other hand, gained great faith in the Triple Gem and took full ordination as a monk in the later part of his life. ☸

THE MAN AND HIS FIVE SONS

Once, there was a man who lived in the woods. He started growing crops with his five sons in a clearing about a mile from their home village. He erected a small shack at the clearing and would often take his sons to stay there.

One morning, he ignited a fire in the shack and told his sons to watch over the fire, as he was going to hunt for food in the forest. "If the fire goes out," he said, "get some fire from my bamboo tube and start it up again." With this instruction, he set out to forage for food.

After he had left, his sons were so mesmerised with their games that when they finally went to look at the fire, they found that it had fizzled out. So they decided the eldest one should get some fire to start it up again. The eldest son walked over and tried knocking on the bamboo tube. However, no fire was seen. So the second child tried, by opening the bamboo tube. He too didn't see any fire inside. All he saw were two bamboo chips but he didn't know what to do with them.

When it was the third son's turn to get some fire, he took a knife and cut the tube into two halves. Still, he didn't see any fire. The fourth boy went over and, seeing the two halves lying there, shaved them down into thin strips to locate the fire in them. But just like his elder siblings, he could see no fire at all.

Finally, it was up to the fifth son to get some fire. Before he went over, he said to his brothers, "What's the matter with all of you? Can't you get any fire from the bamboo tube? What a bunch of fools you are! I'll go get it myself." With that, he went to look at the bamboo tube and found it ripped into strips lying in a pile. Realising what his brothers had done, he thought, "What a bunch of hare-brains," and reached out for a mortar and pestle and started to grind up the bamboo strips to find the fire in them. By the time he ran out of strength, he had ground them into powder, but he still hadn't found any fire. So he slipped off to play by himself.

Eventually, the father came back from the forest and

The Dhamma is something subtle and fine. Those of us who aren't acquainted with the brightness of the Dhamma — '*Dhammo padipo*' — within us, who don't believe that the Dhamma has value for ourselves and others, are lacking in discernment, just like the boys looking for fire in the bamboo tube. Thus we bring about our own ruin in various ways, wasting our lives: born in darkness, living in darkness, dying in darkness, only to be reborn in more darkness all over again. Even though the Dhamma lies within us, we can't get any use from it and thus will suffer for a long time to come, like the boys who ruined their father's fire-starter and so had to go without food.

We have to look within if we are to find what is truly good. But before we can know ourselves in this way, we first have to know — through study and practice — the principles taught by the Buddha...

The important point is to actualise the Dhamma through the complete practice of virtue, concentration and discernment.

This is an essential part of the religion, which forms the inner part of all those who practise correctly and well. Whether the religion will be good or bad, whether it will prosper or decline, depends on our practice, not on the recorded doctrine, because the recorded doctrine is merely a symbol.

So if we aim at goodness, we should focus on developing our inner quality through the Dhamma of practice (*patipatti dhamma*). As for the main point of Buddhism, that's the Dhamma of attainment (*pativedha dhamma*), the transcendent quality: *Nibbāna*

— Ven. Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo

found that the fire had been snuffed out. So he queried his sons about it, and they recounted to him how they had looked for fire in the bamboo tube without finding any. "Idiots," he thought, "they've taken my fire-starter and pounded it to bits. For that, I won't fix them any food. Let them starve!" As a result, the boys didn't get anything to eat the entire day.

SEEN

The Unrecognised "12 Lotus" Bodhisattvas

> 12 Lotus

Directed by: Royston Tan

Starring: Qi Yuwu, Mindy Ong, Liu LingLing

12 Lotus is a poignant song in 12 chapters, narrating the troubled life of Lianhua (Lotus). Grateful since young, she aspired to sing this song for Guanyin Bodhisattva, her beacon of hope, to whom she would pour all her woes. While children hug dolls, she cradles her image for solace. The girl mothers the image, seeing Guanyin as her surrogate spiritual mother. Guanyin, who personifies perfect compassion thus helped to ease her blues.

"Without love, there is no pain. Without pain, there is no love." A paradox of worldly love! Lianhua's cruel father utters so while caning her during singing lessons. Tough love or just punishment? There is pain only when there is "love" with unmet expectations. Like the lotus which blossoms untainted from muddy defilements, the resilient Lianhua succeeds onstage.

With Guanyin playing a silent but central role, recurring scenes of the heartbroken Lianhua cling to her begs the question of whether her prayers were heard. Her faith might lack wisdom, but she would have fared worse without refuge in Guanyin. Guanyin's name in full (Guanshiyin Pusa) means the "Bodhisattva who regards the sounds of the world". What Lianhua forgot was to heed her inner Guanyin, to listen to her heart with more compassion.

Perhaps Lianhua wasn't focused enough to connect? As in the "Universal Door of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva" of the Lotus Sutra: "...if any of the limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of beings who are undergoing all kinds of suffering hear of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva and recite his/her name single-mindedly, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva will immediately hear their voices and rescue them."

There is a scene where the deeply disturbed Lianhua holds on to her Guanyin image and falls asleep, waking to discover its head broken. Desperate to "save her saviour", she runs into the streets to find someone to "heal" her. Related is a somewhat controversial scene, where she visits a salon to wash the image's "hair". While some might see this as a sacrilegious "joke", in the film, the image of Guanyin is seen smiling on compassionately, seemingly with quiet understanding.

If Guanyin really resided within the image, she wouldn't mind, for Lianhua was sincere, though not in her right mind. Perhaps, she miraculously caused the broken head to urge the traumatised and reclusive Lianhua to go outdoors? Perhaps, the ones who pacified her by repairing and washing the Guanyin image were manifested Bodhisattvas? Perhaps, Guanyin already manifested in many ways for Lianhua!

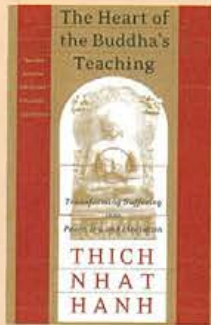
Also from the Lotus Sutra: "If they must be saved by someone in the body of a layman, s/he will manifest in the body of a layman and speak the Dharma for them... Complete with the power of spiritual penetrations, vastly cultivating wisdom and expedient means, going throughout countries in the 10 directions, s/he manifests everywhere in all places." Perhaps Lianhua craved too much for her unfaithful lover to return, when he was no Bodhisattva at all. She needed to let go of her deluded clinging.

Maybe Lianhua did not want Guanyin to be her Bodhisattva as much as she yearned for her lost lover to be her "personal Bodhisattva". Beyond pleading to Bodhisattvas for help, we should aspire to be Bodhisattvas too, like Guanyin, whose door of her heart opens to all universally. May Lianhua's compassion for herself and others blossom like the lotus!



READ

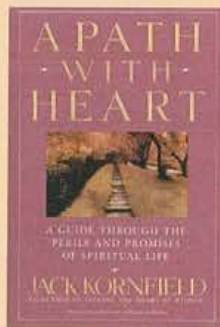
“Because there is suffering in your heart, it is possible for you to enter the Buddha’s heart”



> The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching

By Thich Nhat Hanh

Enter the core teachings of Buddhism with Thich Nhat Hanh and understand how the Buddha’s teachings can be applied in our everyday life. In this journey, he gently guides us and imparts comforting wisdom about the nature of suffering and its role in creating qualities of enlightenment — compassion, love and joy. Buy it from Awareness Place at S\$23.70.



> A Path With Heart

By Jack Kornfield

Tagged as “A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life”, this book, peppered with practical techniques, guided meditations, *koans*, stories and numerous little gems of wisdom, is a warm, rich and inspiring read. Jack Kornfield, a former Buddhist monk and academically trained psychologist, deftly addresses a wide range of issues from emotional healing and addiction to the creation of a Zen-like simplicity and balance in all facets of life. He weaves the most profound Buddhist philosophy and psychology into an easy-to-read, heartfelt and humorous style. Priced at S\$28.80 from Awareness Place.

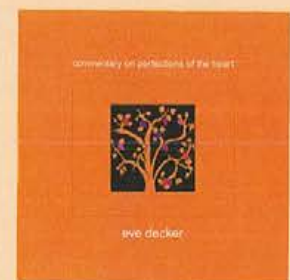
HEARD

Little Musical Perfections for the Heart

> Commentary on Perfections of the Heart

By Eve Decker

Rendered American folk-pop music style, this album of pop tunes and songs is an interesting, energetic and unconventional take of the Buddhist paramitas. Its lyrics are meaningful, and laden with nuances of the Dharma. You can purchase the CDs from Awareness Place at S\$25.00 each.



You cannot discover your Buddha-nature
through words, logic or intellect.
You must observe it directly,
at which point you would see
what a Buddha would see.

If you saw your own original nature,
you would not be able
to describe or analyse it.

If you experience genuine enlightenment,
There is nothing to be said.
There is no discrimination.
To say anything you must compare
this to that; explain one thing in term of another
or speak from your point of view or
another person's point of view.
When you say something is low,
It is only because you are above it.

But when you are enlightened,
There is no discrimination.
You will perceive no distinction
Between yourself and others,
Between one thing and another.
Everything will be in harmony and
undifferentiated.

— *Chan Master Shengyen*

All suffering—
whatever unwanted problems,
obstacles, shortcomings and suffering
that exist—
should be blamed
on the self-cherishing thought alone.

The Buddhas become enlightened
by cherishing others.
So those of us
who practise the Dharma
must think continuously
over and over again
about the disadvantages
of the self-cherishing thought
and the advantages of cherishing others
— taking care of others rather than oneself.

— *Ribur Rinpoche*

You are me and I am you.
It is obvious that we are inter-be.
You cultivate flowers in yourself
so that I will be beautiful.
I transform garbage in myself
So that you do not have to suffer.
I support you; you support me.
I am here to bring you peace,
You are here to bring me joy.

— *Thich Nhat Hanh*

Think of the mind as a tool.
It can be constructive if used well,
Or destructive if used badly.
The choice is up to us.

A single thought can set off
a chain reaction of deeds
that can bring happiness
or sadness in its path.

It is for this reason
that so much emphasis
is placed on mind training in Buddhism,
since a well-trained mind
is clearly the key
to a happy, peaceful and contented life.

— *Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda*



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.

Attachment: Attachments are what keep us turning on the wheel of rebirth. 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) Becoming enlightened is nothing other than severing all our attachments. What is meant by "attachment"? It is the investing of mental or emotional energy in an "object". We can become attached to people, things, experiential states, and our own thoughts and preconceptions. In Buddhist teachings attachments are usually divided into two general categories: attachments to self and attachments to dharmas. For the seasoned practitioner, even the Dharma must not become an attachment.

Aversion: Exaggerated wanting to be separated from someone or something.

Bhikkhu: A fully ordained male Buddhist monastic, who lived by the vinaya's framework of monastic discipline. Their lifestyle is shaped so as to support their spiritual practice, to live a simple and meditative life, and attain Nirvana. Called bhikṣu in Sanskrit.

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-Dharma: Buddhists do not call the teachings of the Buddha, which they follow, Buddhism; they call them Buddha-Dharma, the Dharma of the Buddhas.

Buddha-nature: The original nature present in all beings which when realised leads to enlightenment. It is often called the essence of Buddhahood or enlightened essence.

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

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

Dharma: An aspect of the Triple Gem - the teachings of the Buddha or the general teachings of Buddhism. 'Dhamma' in Pali language.

Dhutanga: Means 'ascetic'. A dhutanga monk is one who keeps some of the thirteen ascetic practices allowed by the Buddha. Dhutanga monks traditionally spend time travelling (often on foot) in search of quiet places for meditation, other teachers, or simply as a practice in itself.

Eight precepts: Include the five precepts and add three more: Refrain from (6) using cosmetics or personal adornments and watching song-dance entertainments; (7) sleeping on a luxurious bed; and (8) eating food after lunch. Lay Buddhists who have accepted the eight precepts need to observe them periodically for one day.

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

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

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.

Four Opponent Powers: Having regret, making a determination not to do the action again, taking refuge in the Triple Gem and generating an altruistic attitude towards others, lastly by doing an actual remedial practice such as chanting Buddha's names, mantras or sutras, meditating, prostrating, making offerings, listening to teachings or reading a Dharma book.

Gampopa: One of the main lineage holders of the Kagyu lineage in Tibet (1079-1153 C.E.). A student of Milarepa, he established the first Kagyu monastic monastery and is known for writing the Jewel Ornament of Liberation.

Guanyin: Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva; the Bodhisattva who personifies

the perfect Compassion of all Buddhas, who hears and heeds the cries of the world. Also known as Chenrezig in Vajrayana tradition.

Ignorance: See '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.

Initiation: Empowerment. Bestowal of permission and a special potential power to practise a specific part of Tantra, given by a tantric guru by means of a ritual.

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. Kamma in Pali language

Koan: A brief anecdote recording an exchange between master and disciple or a master's enlightenment experience. Koans are used to bring a student to realisation or to help clarify his enlightenment.

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.

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.

Meditation: A practice to habituate ourselves to positive and realistic states of mind.

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

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.

Mindstream: Continuity of the mind, stream of moments of consciousness proceeding endlessly in a lifetime, between lifetimes, from lifetime to lifetime.

Nirvana: Nirvana is a Sanskrit term that is interpreted in various ways: 1) cessation, or extinction, referring to the elimination of the afflictions at the time of enlightenment, 2) freedom from desire; and 3) no longer either coming into being or ceasing to be. 'Nibbana' in Pali language.

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).

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

Positive potential: See 'Merits'

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.

Refuge: In the Buddhist context to take refuge means to accept the Buddha and the Buddhist teachings as the path one wants to take.

Renunciation: Determination to be free from all problems and suffering (of cyclic existence), not longer having attachment to the pleasures of cyclic existence which lead to more suffering and defilements. It is inner wisdom.

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, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, demi-gods and gods.

Six Realms of Existence: Also called the Six Paths of Rebirth, it refers to the six categories of living beings who are not enlightened. They are 1) Gods, 2) Humans, 3) Asuras, 4) Animals, 5) Ghosts, 6) Hell-dwellers. The particular category that one finds oneself reborn in depends upon one's karma at the time of rebirth.

Suffering: The physical and mental feeling of dissatisfaction.

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

Tantric vows: Also known as samaya, it is a set of vows or precepts given to initiates of an esoteric Vajrayana Buddhist order as part of the empowerment or initiation that creates a bond between the guru and disciple.

Triple Gem: The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Also known as the Three Jewels.

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

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