

普觉awaken



始觉平生被眼瞒

就是在我们观察事物的时候，不能只看表面现象，而是要善于透过表面现象看到事物的本质，这样才能正确看待事物。

快乐的老师父

保持内心的宁静

佛教与食物

Using the Buddha's Teachings at the Workplace

Right Livelihood: The Noble Eightfold Path in Working Life

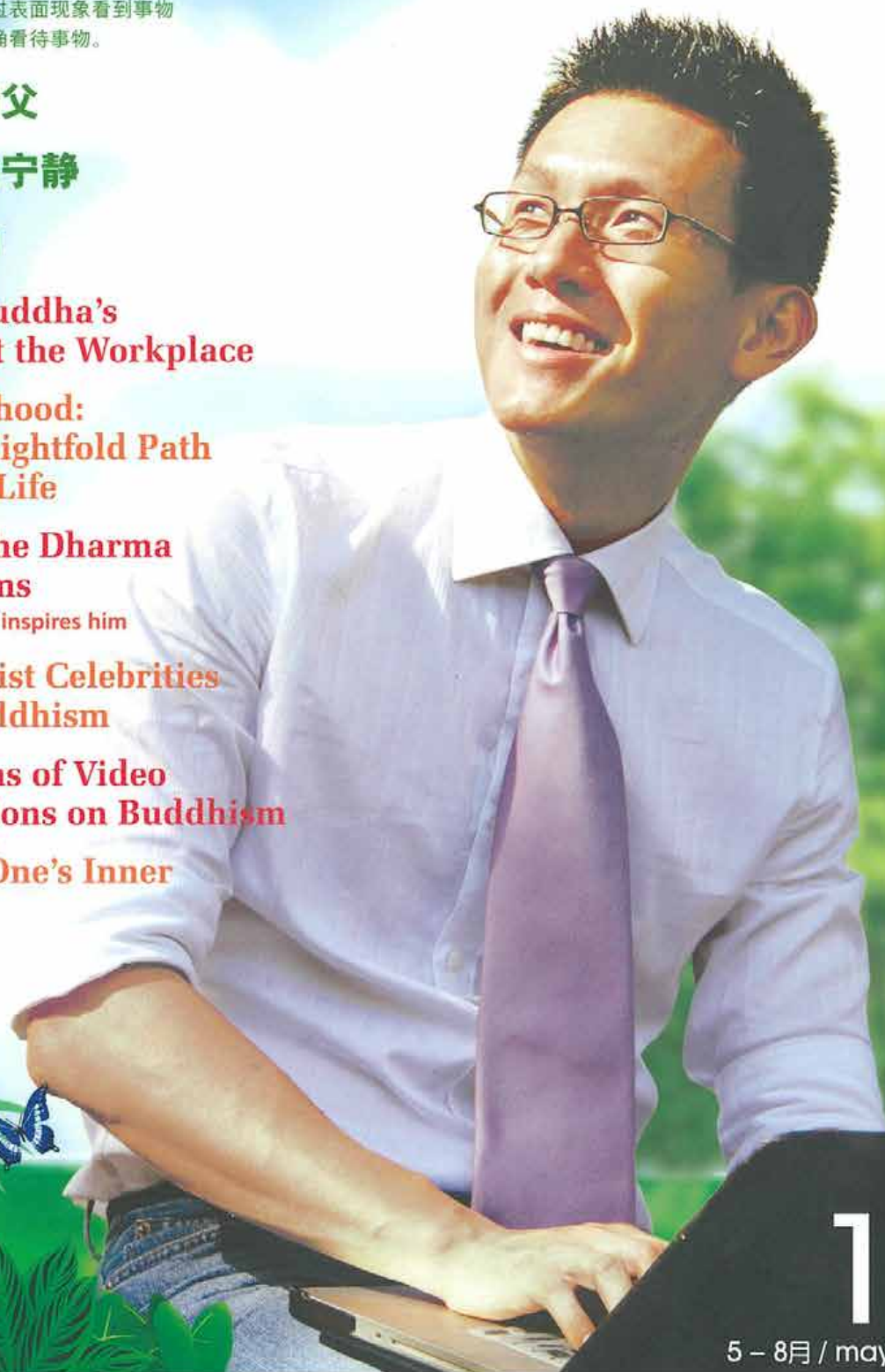
Spreading the Dharma through Films

Jet Li reveals what inspires him

How Buddhist Celebrities Practise Buddhism

Clarifications of Video Misconceptions on Buddhism

Musing on One's Inner Potential



17

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2010



41



38



38

Profiles

41 Spreading the Dharma through Films
Jet Li reveals his mission in life.

For advertising enquiries, contact
65 6849 5341 / 342

Features

43 Using the Buddha's Teachings at the Workplace

46 Right Livelihood: The Noble Eightfold Path in Working Life

Regulars

64 Calendar of Events

36 Q&A

Buddhist News in Brief

38 Cultivating Mindful Kids at the Inner Kids Camp

38 Saving the Buddha's Words through Buddhist Literary Heritage Project

40 Recipes *du jour*

Yummy vegetarian recipes to tease your taste buds

39 Mindfulness Parenting Tip of the Day

The Three Gates

39 Real-life Quotes

How Buddhist Celebrities Practise Buddhism

54 Do You Know...

Clarifications of Video Misconceptions on Buddhism

Something to Ponder

A first-person account of the little things in life worth reflecting upon

56 Musing on One's Inner Potential

Buddhist Tales

Interesting Dharma tales and fables that will set your mind thinking

57 The Squirrel

58 The Young Parakeet

59 The Entertainer

60 Seen, Heard & Read

Reviews of life-affirming films, books and music that are beneficial to your well-being

62 Verses & Proses

A selection of inspiring, uplifting and insightful quotable quotes

63 Glossary

Editor's Note

We spend a large part of our lives working and earning a livelihood. Thus the workplace is one place where we spend a great amount of time and a place that we can apply the Dharma as we do our job well (pg 43), even if our effort is devoted to non-dharma work. We can apply *sila* (morality), *samadhi* (concentration) and *pañña* (wisdom) at the workplace and grow on our spiritual path (pg 46).

For those who are not familiar with the Buddha's teachings, many misconceptions may abound (pg 54). Perhaps you may even have heard of one such misconception about Buddhists being financially poor and unsuccessful due to the teachings taught? On the contrary, the Buddha's teachings have nothing against riches, wealth and worldly success. In fact, the Buddha gave many invaluable instructions for prosperity, success and happiness in everyday life (pg 61).

But worldly success and riches are not equivalent to true happiness (pg 36). No matter what we do in the mundane world – however successful and popular we may be – certain problems and confusions will continue to confront us. It is possible to live our lives in a whirlwind of successful activities, but in the end we must face the fact that all these activities have failed to bring any lasting meaning or purpose (pg 35). They do not bring an end to life's difficulties and pain (pg 59). Jet Li understands this (pg 41) as do many other successful Buddhist celebrities (pg 39).

Working to purify our mind, our innate potential of goodness emerges (pg 56). With a wholesome and compassionate motivation — the wish that all living beings be free of suffering — our energy and effort expended in achieving worldly success, wealth and pleasures (pg 57) are transformed into those of practising the Dharma and of benefiting others, at work and in all aspects of our lives (pg 62).

Elsewhere in this issue, Susan Kaiser Greenland, the author of *The Mindful Child*, who was invited by the monastery to conduct an Inner Kids Camp last December (pg 38) gave a useful tip to parents to guide their children to speak mindfully with goodwill and respect (pg 39).

May all be auspicious and fruitful, obtaining the kind of success they aspire to.



Yours in the Dharma,
Sister Esther Thien

Monks, these five trades ought not to be
plied by a lay-disciple...
Trade in weapons,
trade in human beings,
trade in flesh,
trade in spirits [intoxicants]
and trade in poison.
— *Gradual Sayings III, p. 153. (AN 5.177)*

And what, monks, is wrong mode of livelihood?
Trickery, cajolery, insinuating,
dissembling, rapacity for gain upon gain...
And what, monks, is the right side of merit
that ripens unto cleaving to a new birth?
Herein monks, an ariyan disciple,
by getting rid of wrong livelihood,
earns his living by a right mode of living...
— *Middle Length Sayings III, pp. 118-19.*

BUBBLE OF BEING

BY I Ng Pei Fuen

The bubble couldn't appear more solid.

From the outside, its rainbow of colours entices
and beckons,
it flies high and seemingly free.

Oh, but how fragile it can be.
At a gentle touch or a violent blow...

Pop!

And one sees it is merely the wind element within,
covered by a flimsy and attractive skin,
one which can barely last the aeons,
one which is subject to the elements,
one which is there one moment, but not there at the
next.

The irony is such -
the more you try to hold it or keep it,
the faster you risk bursting it in the attempt...
But if you sit back and admire it from afar,
it floats freely and unhindered in the space,
living out its full lifespan.

The light shining upon it brings out the multitude
of colours,
and as it floats beautifully in the wind
wow, another marvel of nature it truly is!

When its fragile casing meets its match,
it disappears without a trace -
as fast as a trace of fragrance in the air disappears,

when you search for a second whiff it is no longer
there;
without any trace indeed,
not even a relic to say it existed,
maybe only a mental imprint,
on the consciousness of those who experienced it.

Those were the days,
and those will be the days.

One bubble, two bubbles and many bubbles,
mass-produced with the loop of soapy craving
and lubricating thirst.

Come and gone,
they will come and go again,
come again and go.

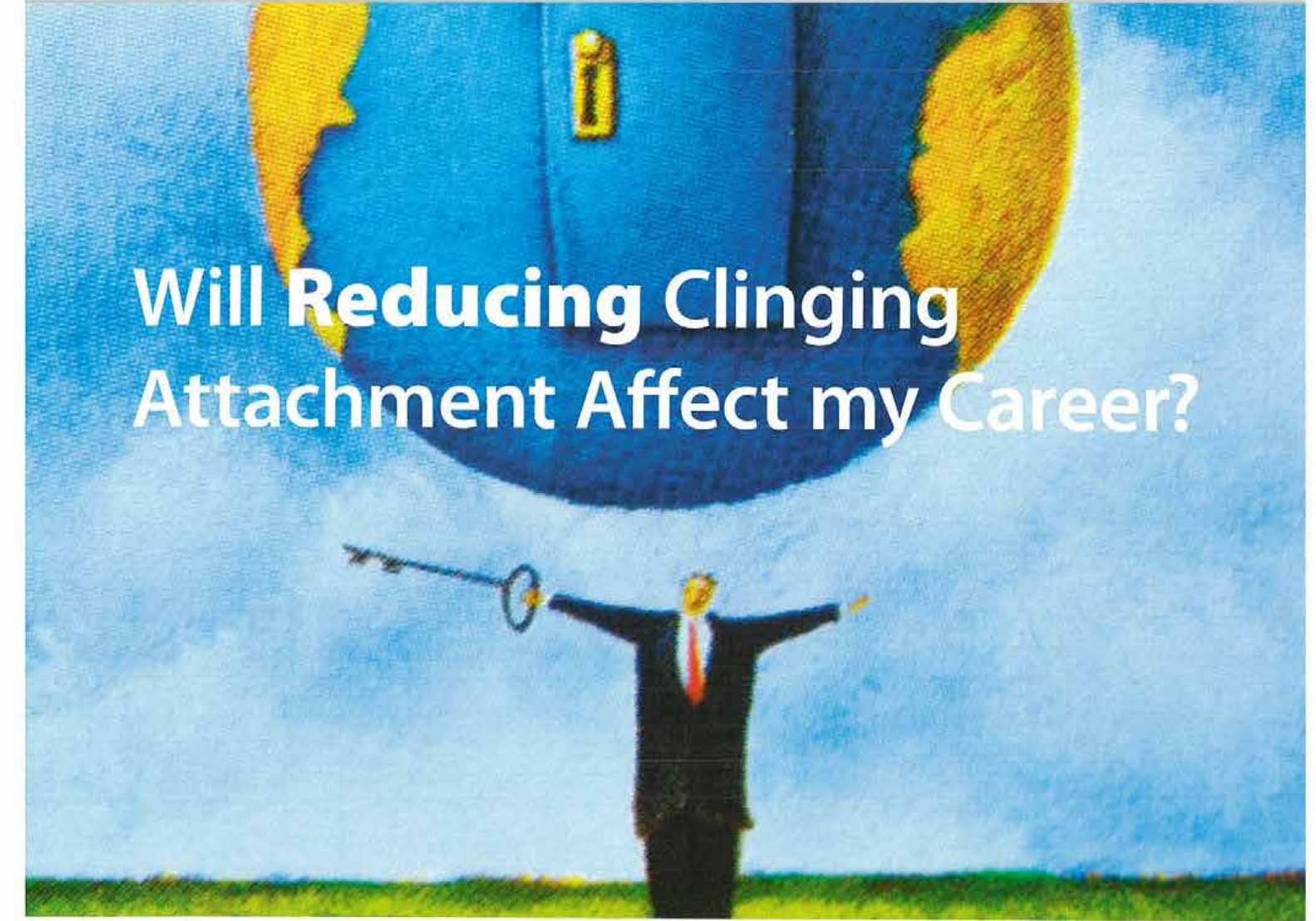
As the child enticed with the new toy
early in the morning endeavours in his
new bubble-making trade,
those devoid of wise companions
take joy in taking up life after life,
bubble after bubble,
craving one after another,
creating one mirage after another...

While those with noble companions learn to watch
the process,
starting from arising, standing to passing away,
and as the entire process is carefully watched and
examined in its entirety,
the noble ones grow bored of bubble-making,
as quickly as the child abandons his toy with the
ending of day,
overcome by fatigue,
losing interest in the game.

There is but a simple rule to the game:

Until passion dies away,
bubble making thrives,
all the way.





Will Reducing Clinging Attachment Affect my Career?

Q: Buddhism says clinging attachment is a disturbing attitude. If I diminish my clinging attachment, what will happen to my ambition? Will I be listless and lack motivation to do anything? What will happen to my career?

— *Anonymous*

A: These are good questions and to answer them we must distinguish between constructive ambition and destructive ambition. Ambition, like desire, can have two aspects, depending upon the motivation and the object sought. Negative ambition pursues worldly success and worldly pleasures with a self-centred motivation. Positive ambition seeks beneficial goals with one of the three kinds of Dharma motivation: to have a good rebirth in the future, to be liberated from the difficulties of cyclic existence, and to attain full enlightenment in order to benefit all beings most effectively.

When speaking of the first hindrance to genuine Dharma practice — attachment to the happiness

of only this life — the Buddha spoke of the desire or ambition for material possessions, money, fame, praise, approval and sensory pleasures such as food, music and sex. Due to our strong desire to have the pleasure we think these things will bring, we often harm, manipulate or deceive others to obtain them. Even if we strive for these things without directly ill-treating others, our minds are still locked into a narrow state, seeking happiness from external people and objects that do not have the ability to bring us lasting happiness. Thus, the time we could spend developing unbiased love, compassion and wisdom is diverted into seeking things that do not satisfy us in the long term. To bring about lasting happiness, we need to decrease this kind of ambition by first, seeing its disadvantages — these actions create problems in our relationships with others and also plant negative karmic imprints on our mindstream — and second, recognising that the things worldly ambition seek lack the ability to bring us long-term happiness. There are many rich and famous people who are miserable and suffer from emotional problems and alcoholism.

As we gradually decrease our worldly ambition, space opens up in our minds to act with compassion and wisdom. This is positive ambition. Compassion — the wish that living beings be free of suffering — can be a powerful motivator for action. It can replace the anger that previously motivated us when we saw social injustice, and inspire us to help others. Similarly, constructive ambition is imbued with the skilful wisdom that reflects carefully on the long- and short-term effects of our actions. In short, through consistent practice, the energy of our selfish ambitions for worldly pleasures is transformed into the energy of practising the Dharma and benefiting others.


For example, let's say Sam is very attached to his reputation. He wants people to think well of him and speak well of him to others, not because he really cares about people, but because he wants people to give him things, do things for him, and introduce him to famous and powerful people. With this motivation, he may lie, cover up his shortcomings, pretend to have qualities he doesn't have, or to have contacts which are, in fact, bogus. Or, he may even do something seemingly nice, such as speak sweetly to someone, but his intention is solely to fulfil his selfish wish.

If he stops and reflects, "What is the result of such an attitude and such actions? Will attaining what my ambition seeks really bring me happiness?" Sam would realise that, in fact, he is creating more problems for himself and others through his deceit and manipulation. Although at the beginning he may be able to fool people, eventually he will give himself away and they will discover his base motives and lose faith in him. Even if he succeeds in getting the things he wants and initially feels good, these things will not leave him totally satisfied and will bring with them a new set of problems. In addition, he is creating negative karma, which is the cause for problems in future lifetimes. By thinking in this way, his worldly ambition will die down and there will now be space to think clearly. Reflecting on his interdependence with all beings, Sam will understand that his own and others' happiness are not separate. How could he be happy if those around him are miserable? How could he bring about others' happiness if he neglects himself? He could then engage in various projects with this

new, more realistic motivation of care and concern for self and others.

As we leave behind worldly ambitions, we can approach our job and career with a new motivation. With worldly ambition, we grasp at our pay cheque and everything we want to buy with it, and are concerned with our reputation at the workplace and getting the promotions we seek. When we recognise that even if we got those things they would not make us everlastingly happy, nor would they give ultimate meaning to our lives, then we can relax. This relaxation is not laziness, however, for now

there is room in our minds for more altruistic and far-reaching attitudes which motivate our work. For example, in the morning before going to work, we can think, "I want to offer service to my clients and colleagues. My purpose in working is to benefit these people and to treat them with kindness and respect."

Imagine how different our working environment would be if even one person — us — acted with that intention as much as we could! We can also think, "Whatever happens today — even if I get criticised or stressed out — I will use it to learn about my mind and to practise the Dharma." Then, if unpleasant things happen at work, we can observe our minds and try to apply the Dharma antidotes to disturbing emotions such as anger. If we are not successful with quieting our minds down on the spot, when we come home we can review what happened and apply the Dharma antidotes, for example, by doing one of the meditations to generate patience. In this way, we can see that giving up worldly ambition will actually make us kinder, more relaxed, and thus more efficient at our work. And curiously, those are the qualities that will naturally bring us a better reputation and even a promotion, although we may not directly be seeking them! 

— Ven. Thubten Chodron
www.thubtenchodron.org
www.sravasti.org

Cultivating Mindful Kids at the Inner Kids Camp


Singapore – Children learned about self-awareness in a novel way through fun games and activities during a three-day Inner Kids Camp held last year in Maha Bodhi School.

Learning vital life-skills such as patience, acceptance, cooperation, gratitude, interconnection, mindfulness and compassion, the children also understood the importance of having respect for themselves, others and the world around them. Besides being equipped to speak wisely, with goodwill and respect, the children learned to listen with kindness and patience, about helping others and how different ways of breathing can affect their minds and bodies.

"What I like most about the camp was making the snow globe shaker. When you shake it, all the glitter swirl around. It is like our non-mindfulness. I also like all the games we played,"



quipped Gaia Pourville Piao Yue, aged 10, a camp participant from PKSSSS.

Read about the tip on the next page in guiding children to speak mindfully with respect. 

Saving the Buddha's Words through the Buddhist Literary Heritage Project



USA – The teachings of the Buddha have brought immeasurable benefit to sentient beings for many centuries. To ensure that the precious words and wise teachings of the Buddha continue to flourish for the benefit of all beings in centuries to come, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche and the Khyentse Foundation spearheaded the Buddhist Literary Heritage Project (BLHP) in January this year.


Conceived during a five-day conference in March 2009, where more than 50 translators and seven Rinpoches met in India, the BLHP is a long-term global initiative with the goal of seeing the riches of Buddhist sacred literature translated into modern languages and made universally accessible.

"By translating the Buddhist texts into modern languages, we save a vast swath of Buddhist

civilisation and culture from annihilation," said Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche.

"A huge part of the Buddha's teachings is locked away in the classical Tibetan language. Because translating these texts requires not only proficiency in classical Tibetan and Sanskrit but also an advanced understanding of the Buddha's teachings, less than 5% of the classical Tibetan texts have been translated to date," explained Huang Jing Rui, the Executive Director of BLHP.

"There is an urgent need to gather and coordinate the talents of translators, teachers, scholars and wisdom seekers to uncover the meaning of the *Kangyur* and *Tengyur* and make them universally available, before the meaning becomes irretrievable due to the passing of the very few people alive today who still hold the deep traditional learning necessary to interpret these texts accurately," she further clarified.

BLHP's vision is to have them all translated and made universally accessible in 100 years' time, she added. If you would like to find out more or support this project, visit www.buddhistliteraryheritage.org. 

The Three Gates

By Susan Kaiser Greenland, author of *The Mindful Child*, and Founder of the Inner Kids Foundation which developed the Inner Kids mindful awareness programme for children, teens and families.

When working with children, I ask that they are mindful of what they say and do. In our Inner Kids class there is one rule which can never be broken: Everybody — children, councillors, teachers and parents alike — must speak and act with respect. They must be respectful to self, to others and to the environment.

But sometimes kids have a hard time differentiating if what they would like to say is respectful or not. That's why it is important to give children clear guidelines and instruction about how to speak mindfully and respectfully.

I've found an ancient *Sufi* teaching known as the "Three Gates" to be a useful way to explain to children how to tell if what they are about to say is respectful. This practice invites kids to ask three questions if they are unsure whether what they are going to say is appropriate:

- Is it true?
- Is it necessary?
- Is it kind?

Simply pausing to consider the statement before saying it is a very useful mindfulness skill for kids to develop.

Parenting Tip of the Day
Mindfulness



How Buddhist Celebrities Practise Buddhism...

Prostrations are my favourite thing in the universe... I am just trying to concentrate on bodhicitta... and the most basic practice of a bodhisattva, including meditation and prayers. By overcoming anger, hurt and attachment; you bring these before the Buddhas, before the protectors, and purify yourself. What gives me solace and eases samsara is Guru Rinpoche, the Lord Buddha and all the protectors. What I do in this life is only important if I can ease the suffering of others, make the world a better place, serve Buddha and humankind, and plant the seed of bodhicitta in people's hearts.

— Steven Segal, Hollywood action movie star



I experimented with many different varieties of meditation, and over the years settled into a Buddhist method called mindfulness... Given the recent findings seem to indicate a positive neuroplasticity — for example, shifts to a more positive daily mood range — I've tried to make more time for it.

— Dr Daniel Coleman, internationally renowned journalist, author, psychologist, management guru and two-time nominee of the Pulitzer Prize.

Rinpoche told me not to take what he said on faith! "Taste it, bite it, test it like gold." I think that is Buddhism's strength. It's not proselytising. The bottom line in Buddhism is love and compassion, and kindness and happiness for all beings.

— Keanu Reeves, Hollywood movie star



Special
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Vegetarian Café
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menu

Shiitake mushrooms must be arguably one of the best natural foods around. Well-known for their healing properties, they contain lentinan, an active compound proven to improve the immune system and promote anti-cancer activity. They're also proven to reduce cholesterol levels, prevent high blood pressure, lower the risk of thrombosis (the formation of a blood clot that inhibits blood-flow), and help ward off viruses, bacteria and fungi, ease inflammation, combat allergies, balance blood sugar levels, boost heart health and support the body's detoxification mechanisms.

** It should be noted, that since all varieties of mushrooms are a significant source of purines, which break down in the body to form uric acid, they are not recommended for sufferers of gout or kidney stones.*

Tom Yum Bee Hoon 冬炎米粉



Ingredients:

170g brown rice bee hoon, 50g white cabbage (shredded), 50g mixed slice mushrooms (shitake, button, oyster mushrooms), 50g mixed bell pepper, 50g bean curd, 30g tom yum paste, 100ml vegetable stock, 10g sugar

Method:

1. Mix all the ingredients in a frying pan except the bee hoon and tom yum paste.
2. When the stock starts to boil, add in the bee hoon. Cook till the bee hoon absorbs the stock.
3. Add in the tom yum paste and fried ingredients. Remove from heat, stir well and serve.

材料:

糙米米粉170克、包菜150克(切丝)、混合香菇、蘑菇和鲍鱼菇共50克(切丝)、三色甜椒50克(切丝)、豆干50克、冬炎酱30克、高汤100毫升、糖10克

做法:

1. 除了米粉和冬炎酱之外把所有材料炒香。
2. 把高汤煮开加入米粉,煮至米粉入味。
3. 离火才下冬炎酱和炒好的材料,搅拌均匀。

Baked Zucchini & eggplant in sweet miso 甜味噌烤绿西葫芦茄子



Ingredients:

100g green zucchini, 100g eggplant, 30g sweet miso

Method:

1. Slice the zucchini and eggplant
2. Spread the sweet miso, bake in the oven for 10-12 mins at 220°C. It is now ready to serve.

材料:

绿西葫芦100克、茄子100克、甜味噌30克

做法:

1. 绿西葫芦和茄子切片,涂上甜味噌。
2. 将材料放入烘烤炉,温度220°C,烤约10至12分钟既成。

Recipes courtesy of Green Room Vegetarian Cafe,
Bishan Park 2, 1382 Ang Mo Kio Ave 1, Singapore 569931
www.greenroomcafe.com.sg
Tel: 6556 1533

greenroom
ESTABLISHED IN 2011

One of the most successful and best-known martial arts celebrities in Asia and Hollywood, Jet Li shares his mission to promote Buddhist values for the benefit of others.

In 1997, I had thought of retiring from the silver screen. Firstly, I was feeling rather tired. Secondly, I wanted to concentrate on studying and practising Buddhism. At that time, I met Lho Kunsang Rinpoche, a spiritual master of Tibetan Buddhism who became my teacher. Rinpoche told me I could not retire yet for I had not completed my mission for this life.

I was puzzled when I heard this. "How can that be?" I asked. "I'm contented with what I have, and am satisfied with my career, my reputation, my family and all that I have accomplished."

"You have a larger responsibility," Rinpoche continued. "You will realise it on your own through experience."

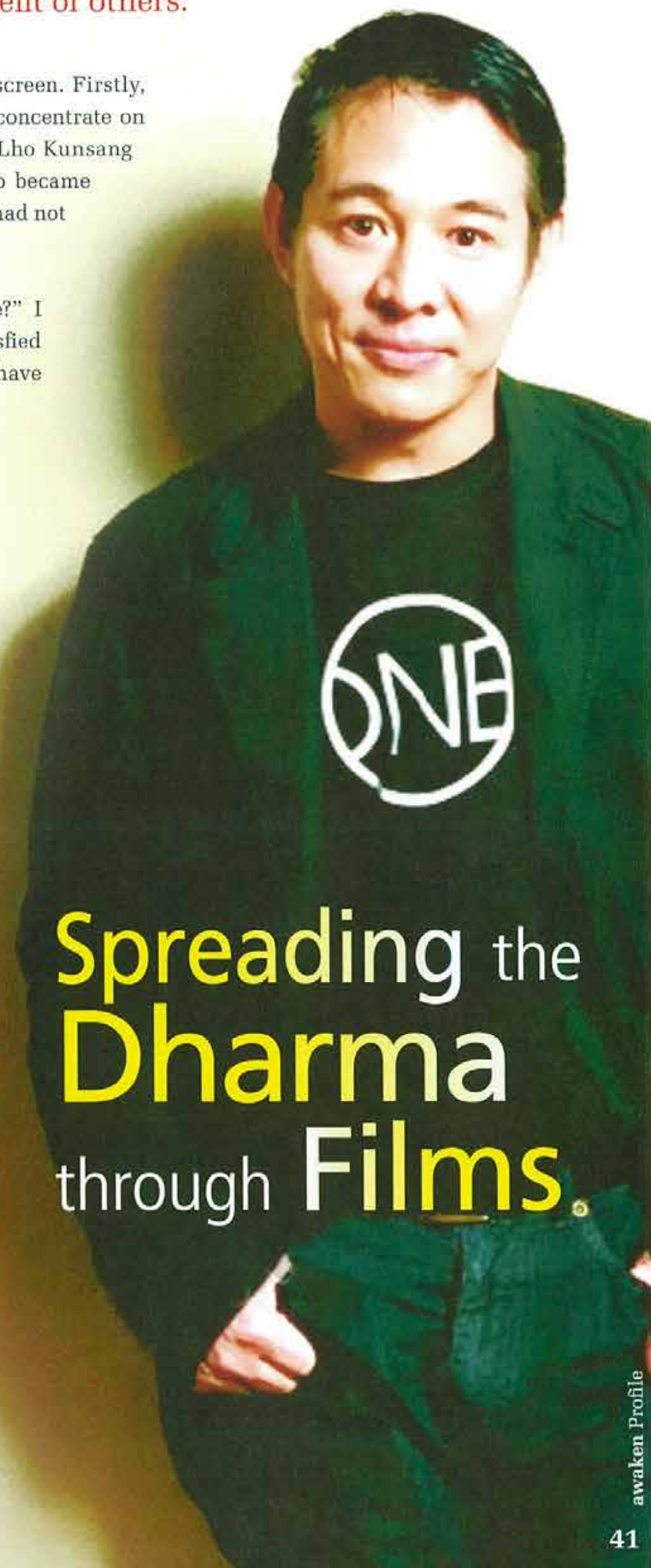
I had no idea what he meant. I did not care to make more money as I had made enough to take care of my family for a long time. As for fame, we all know how fleeting it is. How many famous people, celebrities or movie stars have existed throughout history? And how many have faded from memory?

Time dilutes everything. Youngsters these days don't even know the names of stars from the previous generation. If you see through the lure of fame, you certainly won't let it drive you, so I don't crave for more fame.

As time passed, I realised and began to have an inkling of what Rinpoche meant by "larger responsibility". I have a responsibility to help introduce the Buddha-Dharma to the West and also share with others the delight, joy and inner peace I have achieved through practising the Buddha's teachings by means of personal influence and the media.

I notice the biggest problem in life is how much people love to complain. They complain about their health, their job, their boss, their relationships, their family. People ramble on and on about what's wrong with their life and how everybody else is making things difficult for them.

Image: www.lohasmetro.com



Spreading the
Dharma
through **Films.**



Image: www.flickr.com/photos/ourworldyourmove

But the things that happen to us are created by the actions in our immediate past. Consequently, the things we do in this life, our actions, words and behaviour, all determine what would happen to us in our next life. The greatest enemy a person can have is one's own ego.

(Ed: This is in line with what a few Venerables had said: We always ask "why me?" when bad things happen to us, but we don't ask "why me?" when good things happen. We seem to take good things for granted because we are attached to them. And we push away those which are not good. But all these are the results of our karma!)

We may be able to pull wool over others' eyes, but we can never lie to ourselves. We know who we have complained about, what tasks we have left unfinished and which promises we have failed to keep.

Think of it this way: we set the stage for a character with all kinds of motivations, unresolved issues, mistakes that this character needs to address, redress or correct the next time round. In fact, you might say

that you are at all times writing the script for your next life.

You might think twice when you complain about your current situation, because who do you think is responsible for making it happen? Who do you think arranged for certain characters to show up at certain moments? Who crafted the tragic twists in the story, and the difficult challenges and situations? Karma writes the script and we alone are responsible for our karma through our thoughts, words and deeds.

The world might be a different place if more people can understand this. There would be less complaining, and perhaps we would be nicer and more loving to others as we see clearly the true value of a human's life, and see worldly factors such as fame and fortune from a different perspective.

My aim and hope now is to use the medium of film, TV or the Internet to share my understanding of Buddhism with those who are willing to listen; to spread the wisdom and valuable teachings of the many great Buddhist masters and Rinpoches beyond; and to convey the importance that love and kindness play in our interconnected existence.

That's my motivation now — to make movies that will help inspire greater wisdom rather than focusing on the box office returns. I just want to contribute my part in promoting the Buddhist philosophy of loving-kindness and universal love, so that some can understand, even if it's just a little, how to make the most of this precious human life.

I'm not trying to convert my viewers; I just want to offer information that they might otherwise never encounter as food for thought. If they are not interested in the message, they may not even notice it. If they are ready to listen, they will. ☺

Adapted by Esther Thien from the article and interview published in www.forfo.net and *How to Develop Happiness in Daily Life*.

Using the Buddha's Teachings at the Workplace

BY | Patrick Tay

The Buddha's teachings relate to all of us, regardless of our age, gender and life experiences, primarily because of the efficient use of metaphors and the high degree of realism that enable many readers to relate the teachings to their daily lives.

There are many memorable and useful quotes from Buddhism that are worth mentioning and highlighting. For this article, I have chosen this quote:

*“Quiet your mind.
Reflect.
Watch.
Nothing binds you.
You are free.”*

While this quote seems to refer to sitting meditation at first glance, its emphasis is more on living in the moment, increasing our power of observation while doing so and engaging in consistent introspective



reflections. We can use this practice to great effect in all aspects of our lives but for this article, let's focus on using it at the workplace, where most of us spend a great amount of our time.

Although the quote is short, the underlying meaning per line is profound. So, let us explore this quote line by line.

“Quiet your mind”

If we are observant and introspective, we will realise that our minds are a constant chatterbox that never stops talking to us. This is primarily caused by our ego, which gives us a sense of “self”. This “self” separates us from the universe when in actuality, we are a part of it. Therefore, by asking us to quiet our minds, the Buddha is encouraging us to

stop this inner chatter, thereby bringing us back to the present moment. Without being in the present moment, we will never be happy — because our inner chatter and thoughts are usually stuck in the past or projected into the future. We may frequently entertain the following thoughts when we are at work:

"I wish I have a better life."

"I prefer the times spent with my friends during my university days."

"I wish I have a great girlfriend/boyfriend now."

"I am angry with my boss for making me work longer hours than usual."

"I wish I am richer than others."

Such inner chatter is very attractive and enticing to human minds because our minds prefer pleasure to pain (two of the eight worldly concerns of sentient beings). But because these thoughts are in the past or future, we are not really living our lives in reality but in daydreams. Only when our minds are quietened down can we truly reside in the present moment and live our lives with joy.

“Reflect”

We should be grateful that the Buddha asks us to reflect immediately after we have quietened our minds. It is pointless to quieten our minds without knowing the benefits of doing so. A good way to quiet our minds is through meditation. However, meditation practice takes time to master, so an alternative is to bring your entire attention to the present, which is your environment. It will be good to reflect on the differences between living in the present as compared to living in the past or future after you have quietened your mind. This is very effective in the modern workplace, as we tend to be planning for the future without us living very much in the present.

However, this is not enough.



We need to consistently reflect on and express gratitude for what we have in life and what others have done for us and radiate loving-kindness to others.

With gratitude, we will win the respect and love of our colleagues, thus establishing stronger rapport with them. And with loving-kindness, we extend a loving gesture and helping hand to our colleagues, thus further cementing the positive relationships with them.

By being reflective, the Buddha wants us to see this positive change for ourselves. We have to do this for ourselves because in Buddhism, each of us has to walk the path on our own based on the Buddha's teachings and guidance. Nobody else is able to walk the path of enlightenment for us.

“Watch”

Be more observant. Look at the people around you. Enjoy the environment. Live in it. You will discover that your thoughts will reduce over time. Calmness sets in and happiness results. There will be a point in time where you will feel like smiling or even laugh, without any reason to. There seems to be an intense inner joy coming out of you and you seem to be immersed in it. When one reaches this phase and with continued

practice, one will experience continued and abundant joy that is true joy itself. In the workplace, just focusing on our work and not worrying over it brings an inner peace within ourselves.

And as we continue to live in the present moment while expressing gratitude and loving-kindness towards others, we will see our lives change positively right before our very eyes.

“Nothing binds you”

When we reach this stage in our spiritual development, we will realise that in life, nothing holds us back except ourselves. When we have this realisation, we will discover that we shape our own lives, based on the Buddha's guidance.

“You are free”

Freedom follows those of us who understand that we set our own limits to our own spiritual development. When we are freed from negative emotions, thoughts and motives, we free ourselves from the intense mental anguish that causes us to suffer.

This does not only apply at the workplace but in all aspects of our lives. So, it will be great if we can consistently practise the teaching with utmost sincerity.

Over time, we will be free from suffering. ☺

What we are up against are our emotions, thoughts and motives. Once we can correctly shape these aspects of ourselves, bliss will follow. Thus the factors that bind our joy are not our workloads, difficult bosses or colleagues but our perspectives on the situations.

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 yakshas, 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.

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Just what is Right Livelihood — how broad is the category of trades a disciple of the Buddha cannot ply? This essay attempts to outline how we can try to use the Noble Eightfold Path in relation to our work — be it in an office or a factory, in the city or country, indoors or outdoors, white collar or blue collar or neither. If the meditator succeeds in applying *sila* (morality), *samadhi* (concentration), and *pañña* (wisdom), the three aspects of the Path, at work as well as in all other life situations, he will be growing in Dharma even during the part of the day that is apparently devoted to non-Dharma work. At the same time he will be doing his job well and sharing his peace of mind and *metta* (loving-kindness) with those his livelihood brings him into contact with.

Prohibited livelihood


The fields of livelihood which the Buddha prohibited to his lay followers are limited to those in which

the disciple would be directly involved in breaking one or more of the Five Precepts, which are the very basic moral rules for the Buddhist layman.

Anyone who is attempting to develop morality, concentration and wisdom, to grow in compassion and insight, cannot deal in weapons of any sort, at any level of the business because by doing so he would involve himself in causing harm or injury to others for his own monetary gain.

Trading in human beings as slaves or for prostitution or any job with such overtones is to be avoided.

Breeding animals for slaughter as meat or for other uses that may be made of the carcasses is not allowed because this obviously implies breaking the First Precept: *I shall abstain from killing*. Similarly, anyone trying to follow the teachings of the Buddha should avoid hunting and fishing,

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a light blue blazer over a white top, sitting on a wooden bench outdoors. She is looking down at an open book or tablet she is holding in her lap. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with greenery and a building.

Right Livelihood: The Noble Eightfold Path in Working Life

BY | Susan Elbaum Jootla

Neither should he be an exterminator of animals. If we manufacture, deal in, or use insecticides or other kinds of poisons in our work, we are engaging to some degree in wrong livelihood because here, too, we are breaking the First Precept and directly encouraging others to do so as well.

Dealing in alcohol or intoxicating drugs would be making oneself directly responsible for encouraging others to break the Fifth Precept: *I shall abstain from all intoxicants*. While not everyone we meet is trying to keep these precepts, to help others directly in breaking any of them is certainly wrong livelihood.

However, the motivation behind such acts has a great bearing on the depth of the karma being created. A doctor rightly gives drugs which are harmful to bacteria and viruses, not because he hates the "bugs", but in order to help cure the patient. But if we go about applying poison to rat-holes and cockroaches' hideouts with anger or aversion towards the pests, we would be generating considerably strong, bad karma.

These five are the only ways of earning a living which are to be strictly avoided by one who is walking on the Path, although some other occupational fields may seem trivial to the meditator investigating the job market. They may appear to be just helping others to create more *tanha* (craving), or they may involve some indirect responsibility in wrong speech or action. But we must find our work within the context of the society we inhabit and within the framework of available job opportunities. It is not possible first to go about setting up the ideal Dharma community and then find work within it; so we must live in the society and serve its members to the best of our ability.

Someone who finds Dharma in middle age and is settled into a career with little reasonable possibility of shifting to another one more strictly in accord with Right Livelihood can — and must — practise Dharma as far as possible within his context. For example, only rarely does an army officer serve in combat — the rest of the time there is ample scope for him to work wisely, according to *pañña*, in a detached way, giving the necessary commands without being overly harsh. There are a substantial number of police officers in Rajasthan doing

vipassana meditation who already are feeling the benefits of meditation in preserving law and order and dealing with criminals and the general public with little anger. Even people whose livelihood is solely dependent on hunting or fishing can at least develop *dana* (liberality) and other virtues — as Burmese fishermen do — even if it is impossible for them to give up an incorrect mode of earning a living. After all, an important reason for which serious Buddhists become monks is that "the householder's life is full of dust," and few positions for lay livelihood can allow one to be completely pure.

Due to the interdependence of all phases of society and today's complex economic structures, it is very difficult to live as a layman and keep the perfect *sila* the meditator strives for — a farmer has to use insecticides, public health workers kill mosquitoes and their larvae, a truck driver may sometimes have to transport arms or poison. Often one is in a position of having to exaggerate one's statements or omit disadvantageous facts, even if one does not like it. So we must earn our livelihood as we have been trained, and as we find a position for ourselves in society while constantly making an effort to grow in Dharma.

One cannot use Dharma for one's increased mundane profit and continue to grow in *pañña* (wisdom) at the same time because then desire for gain (which is *tanha*) will be the root of one's very Dharma practice and a complete distortion of the real purpose of Dharma — the elimination of craving (*tanha*) and so of suffering (*dukkha*).

Occupational work is a means to keep alive and to support one's dependants so that one can grow in Dharma. Trying to use the Dharma to help one achieve more at work and ignoring the Noble Eightfold Path or getting so involved in business that one cannot even sit for meditation an hour in the morning and evening is making a farce of Dharma — perhaps keeping the form but surely losing the essence of the Buddha's teaching. This is the way of *dukkha*, productive of suffering.

To alleviate *dukkha* one must live by the Eightfold Path, earning one's livelihood within its context, trying to practise *sila*, *samadhi* and *pañña* — morality, concentration and wisdom — at the workplace as well as in sitting meditation.

Applying Teachings at work

i) Sila

Once we have found a suitable job, the more long-range task begins — applying the Buddha's teachings at work. If we can keep *sila* only during meditation courses what serious benefit have we gained from such training periods? If we lose all our mindfulness, concentration and wisdom when we are confronted with the vibrations of a big city or the workplace, where is our wisdom?

To grow in Dharma, we have to constantly try and apply the whole of the Noble Eightfold Path in all life's circumstances, and some of the more challenging situations we will come across are very likely to be those we meet during working hours.

Jobs are particularly important occasions to keep carefully to the Path for a number of reasons:

- (1) usually we do not have the support of the Sangha while at work and so are completely on our own;
- (2) work tends to arouse all previous thought associations and our deep-seated conditionings of greed, competition and aversion;
- (3) so many of our waking hours are inevitably involved in simply earning a living.

Let us first examine the relationship at work between the three *sila* factors of Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood.

Right Livelihood will not be really pure unless it includes Right Speech and Right Action as well. We have to strive with determination to keep all the Five Precepts while we work at a job, as well as for the rest of the time.

The forms of wrong speech and wrong action to be avoided are all those in which lying, backbiting, or harming of others would be involved.

If we are honest in our speech and actions, our employers will certainly be pleased with our work and we will be growing in Dharma by confronting our mind's opposing tendencies; we will note when the mind tries to find the easy way out or to blame others for our own errors.

If we are running our own business, we must be scrupulously honest in our dealings with our customers and avoid all "Trickery, cajolery, insinuating, dissembling, rapacity for gain upon gain." We can make a reasonable profit for the services we perform of bringing our commodity to the consumer, but we must not let ourselves get caught up in the businessman's perpetual tendency for gain. The merchant plays an important role and function in the community, but the meditator-businessman must always keep in mind that his job is to serve the society and provide for the needs of his family — not to make the maximum amount of money with the least effort as he might previously have perceived it.

Whatever our work situation is — in an office, factory or shop — we will always feel the benefits of keeping *sila*. If we do not indulge in gossip or slander — "office or academic politics" — but keep clearly to the side of what is right and honest in every situation that arises with other workers or our employers, we will find that we are less often at the receiving end of other people's anger. In fact, if we are really able to keep on the Path at work, we may well find ourselves in the position of peacemaker or mediator between the opposing sides in many a workplace dispute — and in such a role we will certainly be serving others.

To practise Right Action at work we must scrupulously avoid anything even remotely related to stealing for our own personal gain. The less we are involved in anyone else's taking what was not intended for him, the better off we are as well. So it is beneficial to all to dissuade other workers from stealing from the establishment, "liberating" materials, or otherwise misappropriating the employer's property. On the other hand, the karmic implications for us in occasionally having to exaggerate a bit at the boss's behest, or to do the firm's accounts in a legally dubious way they have always been done, once in a while, are not so severe because the full responsibility for such occasional acts is not with us. However, we do bear some responsibility in these situations and if the job seems to require chronic dishonesty in speech or action, and this situation cannot be altered by discussion with the employer, then it may be necessary to change jobs. But we have to keep a balanced perspective and not keep running after the perfect work — part of the

dukkha of the householder's life is the necessity to function in an immoral society while keeping one's own mind clear.

So if we have chosen work which does not involve killing, or trading in living beings, or poisons, or in dealing in intoxicants, we are earning a Right Livelihood. And if, while on the job we carefully avoid lying, stealing and the associated forms of wrong speech and action, we are doing our work and simultaneously practising *sila* on the Path.

ii) Samadhi

The *samadhi* section of the Path during meditation has effects in the mundane world, for Right Effort, Mindfulness and Concentration will contribute greatly to our success in our career.

is overcome by the defilements of sloth and torpor, and probably ill-will as well.

Right Effort at work means doing our best to accomplish the tasks before us — without becoming mindlessly absorbed or involved in them to the point of forgetting equanimity, and without the inertia that comes of a belligerent mind which thinks itself to be superior to the position it is in.

Unrelenting effort in the mundane sphere is summarised by the Buddha in a discourse on the householder's life to the lay disciple Dighajanu (quoted in "Meditation and the Householder" by Ven. Acharya Buddhārakkhita, in *Maha Bodhi*, January 1976):

By whatsoever activity a householder earns his living, whether by farming, by trading, by rearing cattle, by archery, by service under the king, or by any other kind of craft, at that he becomes skilful are tireless. He is endowed with the power of discernment as to the proper ways and means; he is able to arrange and carry out duties. This is called the accomplishment of unrelenting effort.

Right Effort at work must be neither over-exertion nor laziness, but a Middle Path. For a businessman to spend all his waking hours involved in the concerns of his firm means that he is consumed with some strong *tanha* either for making money or for some particular set of circumstances to come about, and this is in direct contradiction with living the Dharma life. On the other hand, the employee who sits back and does only the barest minimum required of him because he perceives how inane his work is, or how absurd it is to put two pieces into a car on an assembly line for eight hours a day, or that his job just helps people keep revolving in *dukkha*,

Samma-sati, Right Mindfulness or Awareness, is the next factor of the *samadhi* section of the Path, and there are several ways in which the mindfulness we gain from vipassana will help us on the job.

Herein, Dighajanu, whatsoever wealth a householder is in possession of, obtained by work and zeal, collected by the strength of his arm, by the sweat of his brow, justly acquired by right means, such he husbands well by guarding and watching so that kings may not seize it, thieves may not steal it, nor fire burn it, nor water carry it off, nor ill-disposed heirs remove. This is the accomplishment of watchfulness.

The quality of mindfulness mentioned by the Buddha here is not the same as the *samma-sati* of the Noble Eightfold Path, but this watchfulness is a by-product of mindfulness important to the lay-follower. The more the meditator has developed awareness in the supramundane field, the more careful he will be in all life situations — meditative, household or work. If one's mindfulness is not "Right," however, then one will be apt to take this injunction of the Buddha's as license to indulge in great *upadana*, that is, in clinging, by all possible means, to what one regards as one's own. This kind of ignorance-based watchfulness will only lead to *dukkha*.



What we have to learn to do is care for the possessions we have acquired so that we and our dependants can make the best use of them, but without erroneously expecting them to last indefinitely, nor of considering them as personal possessions fully in one's own control.

To want only to give away one's hard-earned or inherited goods to anyone who expresses a desire for them is folly. *Dana* or charity can earn us great merit, but only when done in wisdom.

Material possessions in themselves are not the fetters that keep us in *dukkha*, so having fewer things or more, for that matter, will not necessarily bring more happiness; it is our attachment to them that is the bondage that must be eliminated. If we apply Right Mindfulness to the proper caring of our things, we intelligently provide for our own welfare and for those who are dependent on us, not necessarily generating more *tanha* (craving).

Increased awareness or mindfulness is intertwined with improved concentration in enhancing our performance at work. Greater awareness of all the parameters of a situation will enable a businessman to make more accurate decisions, a workman to avoid accidents, and a teacher to really communicate information to his students.

In addition to this mindfulness of external situations, we also have to try to be mindful of our own minds and bodies while we work, as well as after work. Once we become fairly established in the tradition of *vedananupassana* (mindfulness of feelings), we have acquired a ready technique for keeping mindfulness always with us.

Continual change is always going on in our bodies, so at no time can it be said that there are no sensations, since it is the impermanent (*anicca*) nature of the body which causes the sensations. Once we have acquired the skill of feeling these sensations while we are engaged in daily activities, we would do well to keep some degree of awareness of the *anicca* feelings, or of *anapana* (mindfulness of breathing) awake all the time. Then no matter how difficult, boring or exhausting the tasks we face may be, we will find that we have a relatively equanimous and balanced mind with which to face them because we will be alternating mind-moments of mindfulness and wisdom relating to the ultimate nature of our mind-and-body (*nama-rupa*) with the mind-moments that are of necessity fully engaged in the mundane work at hand.

Meditators engaged in contemplating the feelings (*vedananupassana*), who have practised the technique for some time, find that this mindfulness of the sensations which are caused by the continual flux that is the nature of the body keeps them in a balanced and detached frame of mind in all kinds of trying situations — and certainly work experiences can sometimes be difficult enough to make it well worth to develop the skill of keeping the mindfulness of *anicca* (impermanence) always with us.

Concentration, the last of the *samadhi* section of the Path, obviously is vital to anyone in any task he or she attempts. The meditator will find that vipassana has enhanced his one-pointedness and this skill will be applied in all spheres of life, including work. But he or she must be sure that even at work, this concentration is not rooted in strong craving or ill-will, otherwise the meditator may fall into the trap of squandering pure Dharma for material gain, by using the enhanced concentration without the other aspects of the Path, *sila* and *pañña*, to balance it. Naturally, it is always useful to keep one's mind clearly focused on the job at hand — if the mind is constantly running off in various directions towards irrelevant objects, our work will be slowed down and perhaps inadequately completed. As the mind is trained in vipassana meditation to be detached from, not distracted by, the pleasures and pains of the senses, we will find that when we are working, we will encounter less difficulty concentrating on what has to be done, and that we tend to worry less about the past or future. This does not mean that we do not plan our purchases or work schedule, or ignore the future implications of decisions taken at the present moment. We do all these kinds of activities; we make all needed choices and decisions, but once such actions have been taken, the mind settles right back to the job of the present without being hampered and held back by worries about the past or fears of the future.

An artist, mechanic or craftsman is much better at creating if his concentration is clear and his mind stays firmly with the materials at hand. A doctor's or lawyer's understanding of his patient's or client's situation will correspondingly increase as his concentration on what the patient or client describes improves — he cannot practise his profession at all without a fair amount of concentration. Certainly

all kinds of teaching and learning depend on one-pointedness of mind. A merchant, farmer or businessman will be much better equipped to solve the difficulties of his work if he can carefully concentrate on all aspects of the problems at hand, distinguish relevant from tangential issues, and sort out appropriate solutions. Concentration is one of the mental factors that is present in any mind-moment, but the degree to which it is developed varies considerably between individuals. A vipassana meditator generally has a well-developed faculty of concentration due to his mental training and if he puts this ability to appropriate use in the workplace, he will in this way gain mundane benefits from his meditation.

The remaining sections of the Noble Eightfold Path fall into the category of wisdom.

iii) Pañña

Right Understanding (*samma ditthi*) requires a basic understanding of the Four Noble Truths — of Suffering, its Cause, its Cessation, of the Law of Karma or moral cause and effect, and the Doctrine of Dependent Origination. It means the ability to see things as they are in their true nature by penetrating through the apparent truth. This means understanding the *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness) and *anatta* (egolessness) nature of all mental and physical phenomena. This understanding should be applied to everyday life, including our work.

By means of Right Thought, *samma-sankappa*, the remaining Path-and-Wisdom-factor, one considers all that happens in life with a mind that is free of greed and hatred. For this discussion of the Noble Eightfold Path in the work situation, it is not necessary to separate Right Thought from Right Understanding, as without one, the other could not exist in such situations.

To apply wisdom (*pañña*) at work means always trying to keep the mind equanimous and detached while it is engaged in the necessary mundane activities and interaction with other people.

So if the boss gets annoyed and shouts at us, we remind ourselves that he is at that moment suffering

and generating more suffering for himself. We try to do the right thing if he is pointing out a reasonable fault, and in any case we attempt to send him *metta* and not let anger arise in reaction to his outburst.

Whenever a businessman, professor or other professional gets so involved that his work occupies his mind all the time, scheming up more plans or "solving problems" without rest or even time for meditation, he is acting on the basis of ignorance, not of wisdom. He has forgotten that all the phenomena he is dealing with are primarily operating according to the law of cause and effect, and that his own will and decisions can only do one part of any job; the remainder is beyond his control.

One is not seeing *anatta*, the egoless nature of external phenomena if he develops tremendous craving (*tanha*) for the results of his work. *Anicca*, change and decay, is inherent in all phenomena, but we often slip into ignorance of this factor and unreasonably try to prolong favourable business conditions or consider our resources infinite or get attached to any particular situation.

If we forget the Four Noble Truths at work, especially the First and Second — *dukkha* and *tanha* as the cause of *dukkha* — we will continue to generate more and more unhappiness for ourselves as our craving grows in intensity. Job situations, especially since they involve money, are very likely to bring up the strong conditioning for craving we all have from the past. If this desire is not observed and curbed with wisdom, we will be continually digging deeper mental ruts that will inevitably lead to future misery. To avoid this we have to train our minds to see how no situation, however apparently "pleasant" it may seem to be, is actually desirable because: (1) no situation can last, all is *anicca*; (2) the state of craving is itself one of unhappiness; and (3) all craving must lead in the direction of future *dukkha*. And, of course, the opposite situation in which the mind reacts with aversion to unpleasant circumstances, be they work-related or otherwise, is precisely the same — both clinging and aversion are *tanha*.

If the market for our product is favourable at present, if our superiors are pleased with our work, if we are getting good grades at the university, or if any other pleasant situation arises in the course of our work,

we would do well to recall that this situation, too, is unsatisfactory. Pleasant experiences bring *dukkha* because they cannot last forever, and any mind which still has conditioning of *tanha* and *avijja* (ignorance), will try to cling to what it likes, striving to perpetuate the pleasant feelings.

If we keep the First and Second Noble Truths in mind when we encounter both happy and unhappy states on the job, our minds will be able to remain detached and calm and perfectly equanimous — the only kind of happiness that can endure — no matter what vicissitudes we have to face.

At any moment we may run into material gain or loss, be famous or infamous, receive praise or blame, experience happiness or pain. But if the mind remains free from clinging having seen *dukkha* in all craving, then none of this can really touch us and we are sure of inner peace, no matter what the outer circumstances may be.

Recalling the law of cause and effect, cultivating this aspect of *pañña* at work, is quite important and useful. To create good karma, the mind has to remain free of clinging and aversion, so we have to keep a close watch on our reactions if we are not to prolong the misery of *samsara*. We should not, however, expect that just because we have thought of this and are trying to keep ourselves away from *tanha* that this freedom will come about easily — this would be forgetting the *anatta* (egolessness) nature of the mind.

Only gradually can we recondition the mind to operate in channels based on wisdom, by reminding ourselves whenever we notice an unwholesome reaction that such actions lead only to *dukkha*, and that nothing at all is worth getting attached to or developing aversion towards. In this way, over a long period of time, we will notice how the force of our reactions does diminish. So when our superior yells at us and we in turn get angry, we just note the reaction and the sensations that arise, see their foolishness and as soon as we can, just let go of them. If a business deal is pending, and we are getting more tense about it as the days go by,

we may not be able to just give up the tension, but if we observe how this particular conditioning of the mind is happening with some part of the mind detached and with the sensations (which will be reflecting the mind-reactions), we are no longer

meditating, but if we neglect it during the part of the day while at work, we are not living in totality of the Path; and without trying to understand all the situations of life in their ultimate nature, we cannot expect to progress towards the goal of liberation from all suffering.

When we are engaged in our mundane work of earning a livelihood, we must be sure to keep our *sila* (morality) as pure as possible. Vipassana meditation will have increased our *samadhi* (concentration) and we must be sure that it is Right Concentration we apply on the job, along with balanced Effort. Mindfulness of the true nature of the external experiences and internal phenomena we come into contact with when working must be kept alive. And finally, *pañña*, Right Understanding, and Right Thought must be developed with respect to our relationships with our co-workers, the various conditions at the workplace, and the functioning of our minds while earning a livelihood.

When we have undertaken the task of removing all the causes of suffering — which is what it means to be a serious vipassana meditator — we have committed ourselves to a full-time job. To grow in the wisdom that can remove *dukkha*, one must at all times try to practise all aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path. This is the Way taught by the Buddha that enables us to find for ourselves real and lasting peace and happiness.

As we practise the Noble Eightfold Path and live the life of a lay-disciple of the Buddha, meditating while working and living in society, we will find ourselves growing in Dharma while simultaneously serving all those we come into contact with in some fashion or another.

And this is the essence of the Dharma life — to eradicate the causes of one's own suffering by purifying the mind. With the mind thus freed of greed, hatred and ignorance, full of *metta* and compassion, we can then help others in their own quest for real happiness.

May all beings be peaceful! ☸

Excerpted from "The Buddhist Layman", four essays by R. Bogoda, Susan Elbaum Jootla, and M.O.C. Walsh. Access to Insight edition ©2006-2010 John T. Bullitt

reinforcing the tension *sankharas* and so the next time they arise, they will be weaker. Becoming impatient with the unwholesome tendencies of the mind cannot change them and, in fact, this would be generating more unwholesome tendencies of a slightly different sort. If the aversion to work keeps coming up, never mind; just observe that, too, with the *anicca* sensations, and slowly it will decrease in frequency and intensity.

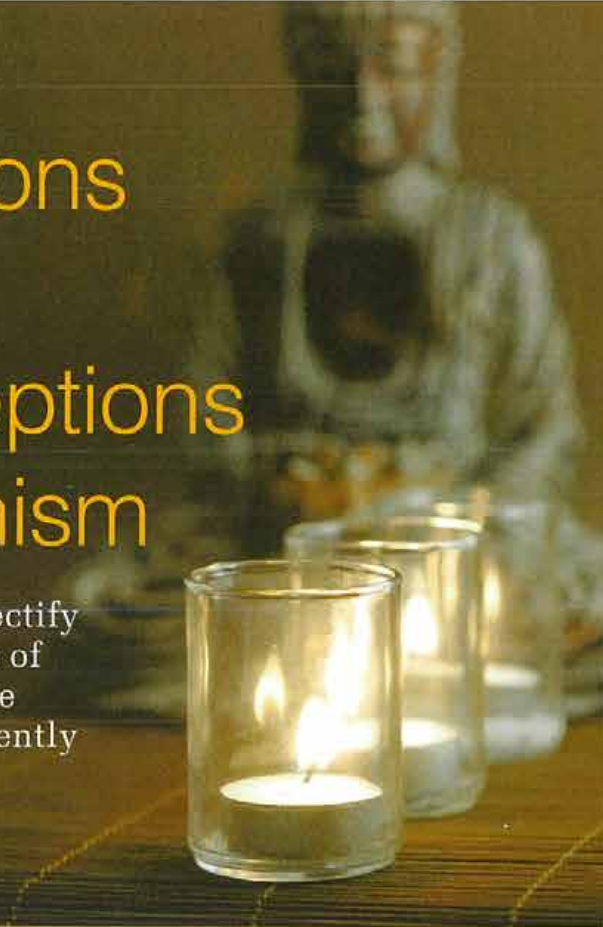
Pañña can and must be applied in all situations. It may not be as powerfully clear as when we are



Clarifications of Video Misconceptions on Buddhism

This article hopes to rectify the misrepresentations of Buddhism in the online videos which were recently featured in the news.

BY | Shen Shi'an



are dynamic, Buddhists do not believe in fatalism or predestination. The effects of our past negative karma can be diluted by our present positive karma, which we actively choose to create now, while our present karma can shape


our future as well too.

1. **Last Words of the Buddha:** The Buddha's last words were "Subject to change are all conditioned things. Strive on with diligence." He was urging us to strive on the way (the Noble Eightfold Path) to liberation (Nirvana; enlightenment) that he already discovered, walked and shared.
2. **Definition of Nirvana:** Nirvana is the perfect blissful state of liberation from all suffering realised by the Buddha, which can be attained by diligent practice of his teachings. It is a state of awakening led to by the awakened.
3. **Dynamics of Karma:** Unfortunate experiences, such as being stricken with a terminal illness, are due to past karma (intentional action) bearing fruit and/or one's present karma created in the moment. If one has an inexplicable illness, it might be due to ripened negative karma from a past life. If one is sick due to neglect, it is the result of present negative karma. As there is no discernible 'first' lifetime in the many rounds of rebirth, it is impossible to be spiritually advanced in one's 'first' lifetime. Furthermore, there must be something done to karmically deserve whatever one experiences.
4. **Openness of Karma:** As the workings of karma

5. **Definition of Rebirth:** Reincarnation refers to the idea of an unchanging soul taking upon a new form from one life to the next, while rebirth refers to an ever-changing consciousness that goes from one life to the next. It is due to this constant change that spiritual betterment and perfection is possible. With the precise and intricate workings of karma, one's rebirth is never by chance, but according to the quality of one's intentional thoughts, words and deeds. There are many animals in this world because it is relatively not easy to have the precious human rebirth, which requires more positive karma.
6. **Validity of Rebirth:** Rebirth remains the only viable explanation of how children with no preconceived ideas and adults in deep meditation have vivid memories of detailed past experiences in past lives, many of which are verifiable upon proper research. Babies also exhibit specific untaught character traits which are probably forces of habit carried over from their past lives. For more about scientific research on rebirth, please refer to the detailed works of Dr. Ian Stevenson.

- 7. Recollection of Past Lives:** Though the ability to recall and learn from our past lives arises naturally through practising proper and deep meditation, the main focus of meditation is to realise calm and clear compassion and wisdom. We can also look at the state of our present lives and our habitual tendencies to know what we were like in the past.
- 8. Significance of Chanting:** Mantras are in Sanskrit, which are sometimes transliterated into other languages. Mantras are not merely chanted for protection, but also for nurturing various virtues. They are not arbitrary strings of words with arbitrary meanings as they are sacred syllables with profound meanings to be practised with right understanding. Buddhist scriptures which are chanted are sacred teachings by the Buddha. The tunes used are to facilitate rhythmic pronunciation, pacing and memorisation.
- 9. Nature of Bodhisattvas:** 'Pu Men Pin' is the 'Chapter on the Universal Gate', from the Lotus Sutra. It is not called the 'Goddess of Mercy Sutra', though the chapter does centre around the enlightened Guanyin (Avalokiteshvara) Bodhisattva, who personifies perfect compassion, and is often mistaken as a mere goddess. Though it is ultimately us who realise timeless liberation ourselves, there is the great assistance of many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to guide us too.
- 10. Nature of Buddhas:** As the Buddha taught the existence of a creator God to be illusory, it is not a Buddhist goal to be greater than God. Although Buddhism teaches that nature (re)creates nature naturally, the Buddha had expounded of a god who had mistaken himself to have created the world. Even wise gods, who were once very virtuous humans seek to learn the path to liberation from Buddhas before they fall from the heavens due to their limited positive karma. Transcending all by having broken free of rebirth, Buddhas are also known as 'Teachers of Humans and Gods', who teach that we can all become enlightened with perfect compassion and wisdom like them.
- 11. Nature of Demons:** Buddhists have no need to protect themselves from gods, who are mostly good, unless it is Mara (the chief heavenly demon)

and his minions. However, when one protects one's mind with high moral integrity, there already is natural protection with the power of truth and goodness. Even demons have the potential to be enlightened if they change their ways.

- 12. Nature of Animals:** As history and present times have seen many cases of animals taking the initiative to protect and rescue humans and their kind who are in need, some animals can indeed demonstrate a greater sense of humanity and morality than some humans.
- 13. Equality of Genders:** The Buddha taught that both men and women have the ability to attain Nirvana. He was the first founder of a world religion who permitted women to enter monasticism full-time. While one's birth as a man or a woman is a result of karma due to various reasons, it is not true that all men are greater than all women, as there are many women who are spiritually greater than the average man – even in the Buddha's time.
- 14. Cases of Healing:** There are countless cases of genuine healing via proper Buddhist practice, though Buddhists seldom use healing to attract devotees, while focusing on its core teachings of nurturing compassion and realising wisdom.
- 15. Minimisation of Attachment:** Buddhist monastics practise celibacy and refrain from entertainment to cultivate their minds for greater calmness and clarity. Monastics of some traditions refrain from handling money to minimise attachment to wealth, which might distract them from furthering spirituality. Novice monastics without proper Buddhist knowledge and practice are not qualified to represent the Buddha's teachings. In addition, beyond seeking impermanent heavenly rebirths, true monastics aspire for Nirvana.
- 16. Harm of Misrepresentation:** According to Buddhism, intentional and uncorrected misrepresentation of the Buddha's teachings which endangers the spiritual lives of many can karmically lead to lower rebirths for extended periods of time. For the welfare of all beings, may all practise greater mindfulness of thought, word and deed. Amitufo. 



BY | Ng Pei Fuen

Musing on One's *Inner potential*

We have the innate potential to be good, and when we purify our mind, this potential will emerge.

indulgence to disciplined abstinence. What had helped my potential to emerge? And I say 'emerge' because I had not done much to train and force these inclinations into place.

Every time I make a public presentation or share with others in an intense, focused manner (counselling), I never fail to amaze myself with the things I say, the insights, love and calmness which seem to just flow readily and naturally from the heart. Some of the things I haven't thought about before just arise as naturally as if it had been residing in me all this while! My tone becomes measured, my voice calming and I become empowered with a startling mental reflex that is able to satisfy others with an answer which is beneficial to them.

Last two nights, I was the emcee for a few Dharma public talks. Some people told me I was excellent as the emcee, some said I had "character", while others said they were totally impressed with my English, accent included. Where did my coolness come from? What accent? My family speaks Mandarin at home, I had never been inclined towards fluent English speaking, and I had certainly never taken up any course on public speaking or presentation.

As I reflect, I am constantly flabbergasted. Since I began learning Buddhism, I saw myself transforming so much, so dramatically and naturally. The confidence, and fluency and clarity of ideas just seem to emerge. And I realise that every time I let go of my own fears, hesitation and views, I am able to get into one of these astonishing states of focus, calmness and great compassion.

Is this the same as the inner potential emerging?

I know for sure that every time I face a situation with mindfulness and just be with the moment, I naturally know what to say and what to do. Every time I try very hard to form a "view", an opinion, that ability falls away. Perhaps all these are the defilements, and as long as they are around, my innate good qualities cannot emerge. It seems that the harder I try, the further I get away from this innate potential. Till today, I still feel awed and cannot explain these observations. ☺

This afternoon, I ran into a group of Buddhist friends as I passed by a coffee shop and stopped to chat. We had seen each other going for classes at the same centre but rarely had a chance to interact. As they caught up on their curiosity of how I got to learn Buddhism and my own path, one of them commented, "Your progress is admirable!"

For the first 16 years of my life, I was obese, frighteningly overweight with a strong, out-of-control attachment to food. But once I got to know Buddhism at the age of 19, I became a vegetarian and shaved off a huge bulk of weight. About two years ago, I started to abstain from the evening meal and shaved off some more weight.

While they are amazed at what I had "achieved", I reflected quietly that it had not taken me much to make these decisions. It seemed so easy and natural to me as soon as the dews of Dharma had begun to nourish my heart.

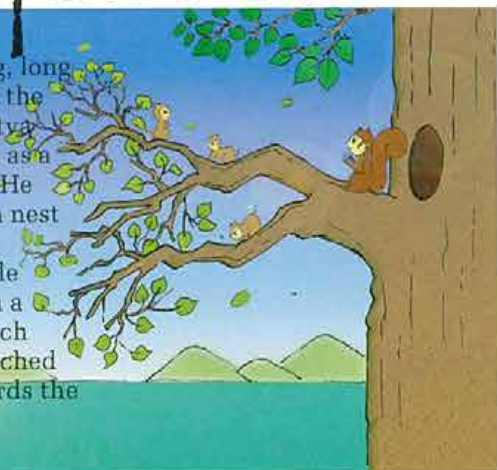
I reflected on how extreme my own path was: swinging 180° from uncontrollable

The Squirrel

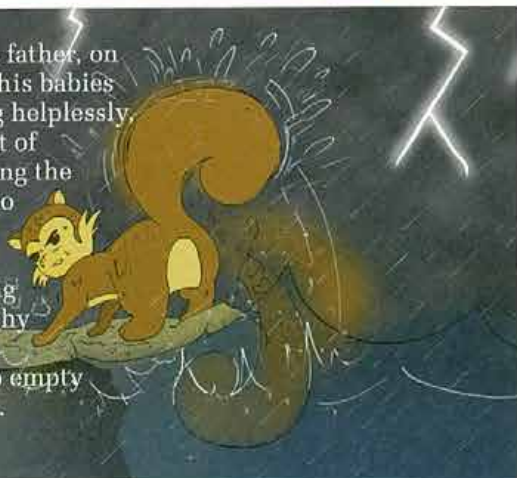


ADAPTED BY I
Esther Thien
ILLUSTRATIONS I
Bee Li

1. A long, long time ago, the bodhisattva was born as a squirrel. He lived in a nest with his three little babies on a tree branch that stretched out towards the sea.



3. The father, on seeing his babies floating helplessly thought of emptying the ocean to save them. Flipping his bushy tail, he tried to empty the sea.



5. I'm trying to empty the ocean to save my little ones.



Ha ha...

6. Oh squirrel, you can never do it. How can you empty the sea? You are being silly.



7. Speak not so, my lord. I have courage and will persist till I succeed.

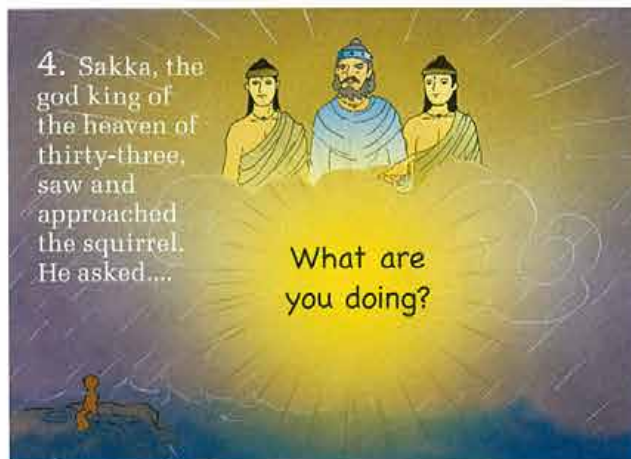
2. One day, a storm whipped through the forest and broke the branch supporting the squirrel's nest. The nest, together with the baby squirrels, fell into the sea.



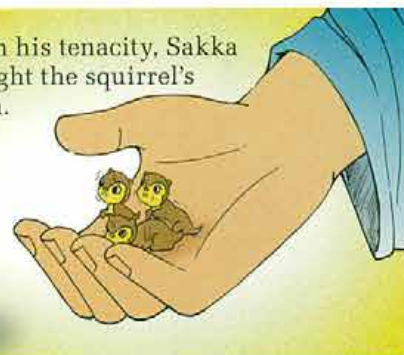
4. Sakka, the god king of the heaven of thirty-three, saw and approached the squirrel. He asked....



What are you doing?



8. Pleased with his tenacity, Sakka saved and brought the squirrel's children to him.



9. Then, with great love and admiration, Sakka gently stroked the father squirrel with his three fingers. The three stripes still on the back of all squirrels are the result of Sakka's soft stroking.



Perseverance or determination is required for all successes and achievements, worldly or spiritual. Nothing can be achieved if diligence or continuous efforts are lacking in any pursuit.
— story from the Jataka Tales

The Young Parakeet

ADAPTED BY | Esther Thien

Once upon a time, there lived a very great parakeet king and queen who ruled over a flock of beautiful parakeets. As the king and queen were growing old with failing eyesight, they called for their son, an outstanding parakeet with magnificent feathers and a good heart, and told him that it was time for him to lead the flock. Understanding that his parents were no longer strong enough to handle the task and that they needed his service, he dutifully agreed and promised to take good care of the flock, just as they had cared for him when he was young.


Now, a wealthy man owned thousands of acres of rice fields surrounding the hill-top which the parakeets made their home. Keen to please his parents, the young parakeet saw some rice ripe at the bottom of the hill and so led the flock down to feast. A field worker employed by the land-owner spotted this and was very displeased. You see he was in charge of tending the rice fields and so did not like the birds on the fields. He tried to chase them away, but of course, the young parakeet merely led his flock to another part of the fields.

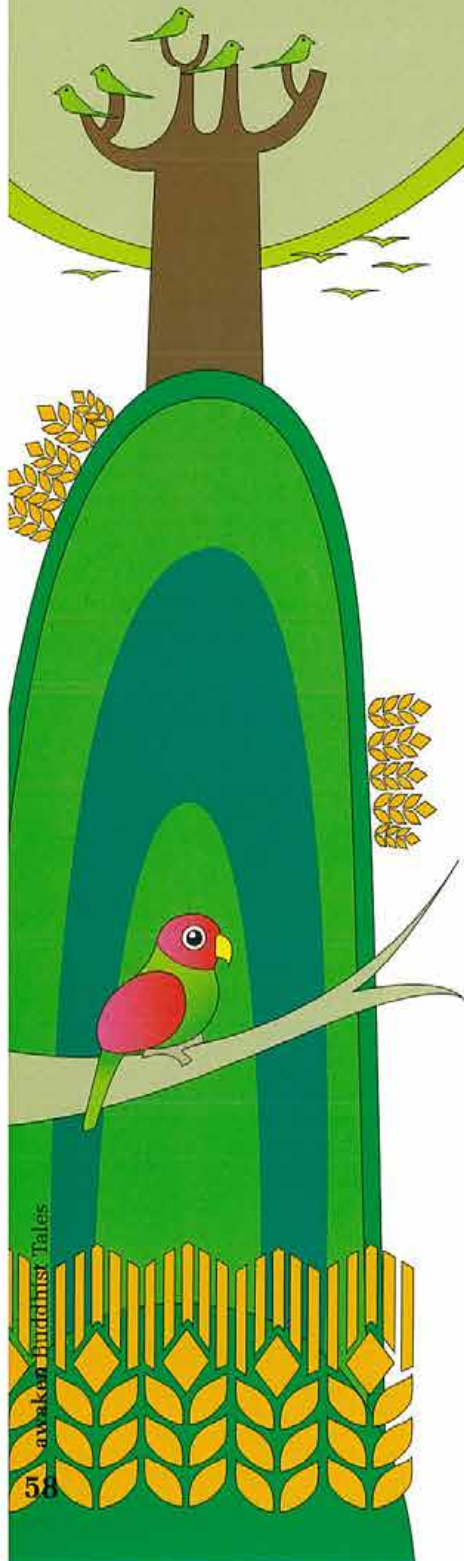
Frustrated with the birds and nervous that the land-owner would suspect him of pocketing the missing rice, he began to study the habits of the parakeets. Much to his astonishment, he observed that the most extraordinarily beautiful of all the parakeets was not only feeding on the rice, but also gathering and flying off with it. He had never seen such a sight before. Completely baffled over what he saw, the field worker went to the land-owner and told him the story of the fine-looking bird that was stealing the rice. The land-owner was not the least bit concerned with the rice, but he was very curious about the bird that was collecting it. So he instructed the field worker to lay a trap, catch the bird and bring him back alive.

The next time the parakeet brought his flock to feed, he accidentally stepped into the trap. It clamped around his leg and caused him great pain, yet he kept quiet until the last bird had eaten his fill before letting out a cry of alarm that sent the birds flying in all directions. The cry caught the attention of the field worker who was tremendously pleased to see that he had caught the very bird he was seeking.

When the field worker handed the young parakeet to the land-owner, the land-owner questioned the bird about the rice. He probed the bird if he had a farm of his own or committed the acts of stealing out of acrimony towards the land-owner. The parakeet answered that it was neither. He took the rice as a duty and obligation to his ageing parents, feeding them food that they were unable to forage themselves.

Hearing this, the land-owner was so touched that he untied the bird and massaged the parakeet's legs with oils to heal the injury caused by the leather straps. He told the young parakeet he had never seen such noble and worthy actions before and for that very reason, he welcomed all of the parakeets to feast on his rice whenever they liked.

Before releasing the bird, the land-owner thanked the parakeet for teaching him the important lesson of love and respect that a good son should always demonstrate for his parents. 



The Entertainer

ADAPTED BY | Esther Thien

A long time ago, an entertainer was summoned to the palace to play music for the emperor with the promise of receiving a reward of a thousand pennies. Happily, he performed before the king. When it was over, he asked for his payment. But the emperor reneged on his words and said, "It is true that you played music, but it only gave me pleasure. If I give you your reward, it would only give you pleasure." ☞

The world's rewards are like this. In the human world or even in the heavenly realm, the little pleasures one gets are illusory. They do not bring an end to life's difficulties and pain. Fleeting and impermanent, these pleasures, however great, are as empty as the music the entertainer played before the king.

~ story adapted from *The One Hundred Parable Sutra*



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"The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion... if there is any religion that would cope with scientific needs, it would be Buddhism." - Albert Einstein

For more information on Buddhist activities for youths, please visit www.4life.org.sg/youth/



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SEEN

Rewind to the Good Old Days

> Be Kind Rewind



Directed by: Michel Gondry

Starring: Jack Black, Mos Def, Danny Glover and Mia Farrow

They say "Imitation is the best flattery." Perhaps so. To that, I'll add that "Improvisation is the best tribute!" Due to hilarious and desperate circumstances in the story of *Be Kind Rewind*, two friends (played by Jack Black and Mos Def) decide to make their own "sweded" versions of blockbuster hits like *Ghostbusters* and *Robocop* – so as to salvage the services of a VHS video rental shop.

In their course of guerrilla film-making, the buddies go bumbling around with shabby makeshift props, half-witted scripts and ridiculous acting (which of course is mindfully good acting here – if you know what I mean). It is said that the

best comedians tell jokes with straight faces. This is probably why the film is a rip-roaring comedy – because we see the guys seriously trying to do it right – in an unwittingly funny way!

In a strange way, their efforts were touching – because they were so terribly sincere! The accidental brand of humour captured on film pleasantly surprises their customers... and suddenly, business has never been better. A truth rings true here – that being genuinely sincere is more important than being the best. In terms of Karma, it is the original motivation that counts more than the action or result!

The revisited films might not be same as the genuine ones, yet they were genuinely refreshing in spirit. They were not even spoofs as much as they were rough personal tributes. Being recordings of both human strengths and foibles, they were moving in unexpected ways – becoming documentaries of sincerity more than flicks of comedies or tragedies. In a bid to save the shop from being demolished for a newer building, the neighbourhood makes a black and white film on its historical value.

Be Kind Rewind takes the audience back to a simpler and seemingly kinder period - when video tapes were used instead of DVDs, when friendly neighbourhoods were truly inhabited by friendly neighbours, when small shops were personal hangouts instead of overwhelmingly big and cold malls. More than a tribute to the magic of film-making, it is a poignant nostalgic tribute to precious heritage lost through change... and of the pain that comes from clinging to the fading past.

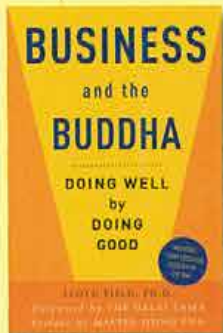
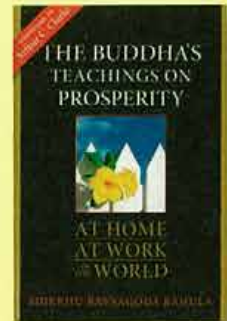
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By Bhikkhu Basnagoda Rahula

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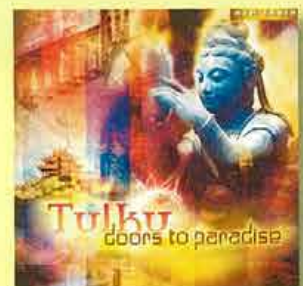
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Worldly success isn't opposed to Buddhism.
(But) worldly success is not equivalent to true
happiness.

Caring for others is the basis of worldly success.
When we begin to have peace and wisdom in our
minds,
the world is a different place.
It's a lot less aggressive.
People have run countries
based upon this approach
as well as navigating their daily lives.

When you are peaceful
or you are acting for the benefit of others,
you have confidence... authentic presence.
People gather around you
because there's something bigger,
something selfless,
which is different than someone
who is completely arrogant or self-obsessed.
– *Sakyong Mipham*

How are you going to practise Dharma at work?
First, try to remember the kind heart
and the motivation you have cultivated in the
morning.
Remind yourself that you don't want to harm
anybody,
that you want to be of service to them,
and that you seek to do all actions
for the ultimate enlightenment of yourself and
others.

When the telephone rings,
instead of rushing to pick it up, think:
"May I be of service to whomever is on the line"
Then answer the phone.

Throughout the day,
try to be aware
of what you are thinking, feeling, saying and doing.

While at work or in the office,
remember the kindness of
other sentient beings who gave you
the job and make it possible
for you to earn a living.

Thinking like this helps one
to avoid generating
negative emotions like anger
at work.
– *Ven. Thubten Chodron*

The more we find out about ourselves,
by self-observation and self-examination,
the better will be our chances
of self-improvement.

We should ask ourselves
how far and to what degree
are we generous, kind, even-tempered,
considerate, honest, sober in morals,
truthful, diligent, energetic,
industrious, cautious, patient,
tolerant and tactful.

These are the qualities
of a well-developed Buddhist,
the qualities we ourselves should emulate.
– *Robert Bogoda*



Anapanasati Sutta: This is a discourse (sutta) that details the Buddha's instruction on using the breath (anapana) as a focus for mindfulness (sati) meditation. The discourse lists sixteen objects on which one may meditate in order to bear insight and understanding into the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipatthana), the Seven Factors of Awakening (Bojjhangas), and ultimately Nirvana.

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

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

Attachment: 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dana: The practice of giving, of generosity.

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.

Dukkha: The truth that life is full of dissatisfactory experiences.

Eight Worldly Concerns: These keep one from the path: they are attachment to gain, pleasure, praise, fame and aversion to loss, pain, blame, and a bad reputation.

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.

Equanimity: That calm and balanced state of mind that is not affected by attachment or aversion to anything.

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

Four Noble Truths: 1. Life is full of dissatisfactory experiences - ageing, sickness, separation, death etc 2. Causes of dissatisfactory experiences - craving, aversion and ignorance 3. Life can be without dissatisfaction - by attaining Enlightenment or Nirvana 4. The path leading to the end of dissatisfactions - The Noble Eightfold path.

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.

Interdependence: Also called dependent origination or conditioned arising. The principle that nothing exists independently, but comes into existence only on dependency of various previous causes and conditions. In other words, a phenomenon exists on condition that the other exists; it has on condition that others have; it extinguishes on condition that others extinguish; it has not on condition that others have not.

Kangyur: The Tibetan collection of 104 volumes of the words of the Buddha, consisting of 1,169 sutras and tantras, with a total of 70,000 Tibetan pages.

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

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.

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.

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

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.

Middle path: The Buddha's Nirvana-bound path of moderation away from the extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification and towards the practice of wisdom, morality and mental cultivation.

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.

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).

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.

Rinpoche: An honorific used in Tibetan Buddhism to mean "precious one".

Samadhi: Meditative stabilisation, concentration. One-pointed involvement in meditation where the meditation object and the practitioner are experienced as inseparable and indistinguishable. As there are many types of Samadhi, the term does not infer anything about the practitioner's realisation or accomplishment.

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

Sankhara: Refers to conditioned phenomena generally but specifically to all mental dispositions or volitional formations.

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

Suffering: The physical and mental feeling of dissatisfaction.

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

Tengyur: A great collection of commentaries or treatises written by Indian masters, which clarify the meaning of the Kangyur texts. 4, 093 in all totalling 161,800 Tibetan pages.

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

Vipassana: A form of meditation that develops insight into the nature of the mind.

Virtues: Blessings which transcend Birth and Death and lead to Buddhahood. Depending on the mind of the practitioner, that is, on whether he is seeking mundane rewards (merit) or transcendence (virtue), the same action either to merit or virtue.

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

Wisdom: The understanding or discernment based on the direct realisation of the Four Noble Truths, Impermanence, Interdependent Origination, Non-self and Emptiness. The Buddha taught that all things are impermanent, arising and passing away, subject to change, and that knowing this — not in a rational, but empirical manner — is wisdom.