



Dealing
with **Life's Issues**

A Buddhist Perspective

☯ *Ven. Thubten Chodron*

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Please pass this book around should you feel that you do not need it anymore. As the Buddha taught, the gift of Truth excels all other gifts! May all have the chance to know the Dharma.

It is very, very rare for one to have a precious human life and still be able to encounter the Buddha-Dharma, therefore please handle this book with utmost respect and care.



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PREFACE

Are you bogged down by life's many challenges? Or confused about how families can use the Dharma to discipline and help children? Ever wondered what Buddhism says about romantic love, marriage, divorce, homosexuality, premarital sex and abortion?

In this book, Ven. Thubten Chodron tackles these and other issues, giving clear and succinct answers to the many challenges, difficulties and problems we face in life, from terrorist attacks, natural disasters, global warming to dealing with the loss of loved ones from terminal illnesses and suicide.

In the last chapter, which is a teaching transcribed from a talk she gave at a Correctional Centre in USA, she tells us in direct terms how through mind

transformation and evaluating our motivations, we can develop our incredible human potential to the fullest and eventually be free from craving, dissatisfactions, hostility, fear and distrust.

Like the Buddha, we have the potential to develop an open heart with equal love and compassion for every living being.

This is an enlightening book with most, if not all, the answers you seek.

May all sentient beings be well, happy and at peace.

May all progress well on the path of the Dharma and quickly become fully enlightened Buddhas for the benefit of all sentient beings!

Yours in the Dharma,
Sister Esther Thien
Executive Editor
Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery
Awaken Publishing & Design
Dharma Propagation Division

~ *Mindfulness is the Method, Compassion is the Expression, and
Wisdom is the Essence* ~

ROMANTIC LOVE & MARRIAGE

What does Buddhism say about romantic love and marriage?

In the *Sigalovada Sutra*, the Buddha talked about ways the two members of a marriage should relate to each other. Basically, human respect, genuine care, patience and open communication are important elements for a long-term relationship.

More than romantic love is needed to have a healthy romantic relationship. You need to love the other person as a human being and as a friend. The sexual attraction that feeds romantic love is an insufficient basis on which to establish a long-term relationship. Deeper care and affection, as well as responsibility and trust must be cultivated.

We do not fully understand ourselves and are a mystery to ourselves. Needless to say, other people are even more of a mystery to us. Therefore, do not presuppose, with a bored attitude that craves excitement, that you know everything about your partner because you have been together so long. If you have the awareness of the other person being a mystery, you will continue to pay attention and be interested in him or her. Such interest is one key to a long-lasting relationship.

Trust is important and is built up by both people being caring and responsible in carrying out their commitments. With the change in gender-identified roles of men and women in our society, each couple needs to divide the duties of running a household and raising a family in a fair way, agreeable to both people. Each person then fulfils his or her responsibilities, thus increasing the trust between them.

Trust is also built up by being truthful to the other person. Thus, it's good to avoid doing things that we have to lie about. If we do make a mistake, let's apologise. On the other hand, if our partner apologises to us, we can forgive him or her and try to let go of any hurt feelings or the wish for revenge. Forgiving someone does not mean we condone their action. Rather, we simply let go of our anger.

Making the Dharma and spiritual practice the centre of one's relationship makes a couple close in important ways. When both partners are intent on

cultivating good qualities in themselves and helping others to do the same, day-to-day activities go better too. See your partner as someone who has the Buddha nature. Then even when your partner is in a bad mood, you will see the person as being temporarily obscured but still having wonderful potential and goodness within him or her.

Some people want to be in a couple relationship, others do not. Either choice is fine. It is not wise for parents to pressure their children to marry or to have a family.



How does Buddhism view lesbianism and homosexuality? What is considered unwise sexual behaviour?

The Pali scriptures make no mention of homosexuality being unwise sexual conduct. For monastics, all sexual intercourse is a root downfall. It doesn't specify the gender of one's partner. Vasubandhu, a teacher who came several centuries after the Buddha, discouraged homosexuality. Personally speaking, I think what's most important is the motivation behind how we use our sexuality. In other words, if people use their sexuality unkindly or unwisely, it doesn't matter if it is directed to someone of their own sex or the opposite sex.

There are several people in our Buddhist group in

Seattle who are gay, and they told me that they knew they were gay when they were quite young. It isn't a learned behaviour. That is just how their karma played out. I feel that criticising or discriminating against people who are gay is counter to the attitude of love and compassion that the Buddha would like all of his disciples to cultivate.

The broader issue relates to the third precept, which concerns unwise sexual behaviour. I don't think this precept is so much about the details of where, when, and with whom one can have sexual relations. It is more about one's basic motivation and attitude, whether one is using sexuality wisely and kindly. If sexuality is used carelessly — for example, if people have unprotected sex when there is a danger of sexually transmitted diseases — that is unwise use of sexuality because such action could damage the other person or harm oneself. If people use their sexual partner for the benefit of their own ego, that is not wise use of sexuality because this could result in the other person feeling hurt or humiliated. Having sex with children is also clearly unwise because that is very damaging to the child. But if people are responsible adults, think carefully about what they do, and have an attitude of kindness towards their partner, they will use their sexuality wisely and kindly, be they straight or gay.

The basic questions one should ask oneself are, “How do I relate to my sexuality?” “Am I always looking at other people's bodies and judging them by

their bodies?” “Do I really look into their hearts and accept them as human beings? Or am I constantly undressing them with my mind because I have a lot of sexual energy?” “Do I respect my sexual partner, and treat him/her wisely and kindly?”

For instance, whether one is heterosexual or homosexual, having multiple affairs with multiple people is unwise since it harms oneself and one's family. Very often, people think that as long as nobody else knows about it and the affair is kept secret and discreet, then it is okay. I can't tell you the number of people who have told me that they knew their father was having an affair when they were children. The kids were intelligent. They knew what was going on but they couldn't say anything at that time. Still, they could sense the bad atmosphere in the family because the father was sleeping with another woman. Such behaviour on the part of parents is damaging for the children. Sooner or later it will come out. It is hard to keep such things covered up for long.

Also, if you are married and you have the intention to mate with someone outside your marriage, this is indicative that you and your spouse need to develop better communication within your marriage. Having a relationship with somebody else is not going to fix the problems in your marriage.



How does a couple build and maintain a healthy relationship or marriage?

If you value family life, and you want to keep your family together, you need to talk things through with your spouse and recognise that there are some difficulties in the marriage. If you need to see a counsellor, consult one, either by yourself or together with your spouse. Put some energy into developing the relationship with the person you are married to.

Couples need to put energy into keeping their relationship healthy. You have to deliberately create and maintain a good relationship, and not just expect that everything will go smoothly now that you are married. You need to learn how to express things to your partner, things that are sometimes difficult for you to talk about or admit to, such as your faults or character flaws. You also have to learn to listen to what your spouse says and really try to hear him or her with your heart. Try to be patient when your spouse has difficulties, instead of being reactive and defensive.

Relationships are better even if just one party has learned to be calm, steady and not being reactive when the other becomes emotional. If you react without thinking clearly when your partner does something, there won't be much constructive interchange. If your partner is unhappy about something, think, "Right now, my job is to listen and to try to help my partner calm down". We don't do that by telling our spouse what to do, but by giving him or her space to say how he or

she is feeling and discuss these feelings in a reasonable way. Be supportive of the other person instead of being reactive to what he or she is going through. Similarly, when you are experiencing a strong emotion such as anger, know that you are angry and try to calm yourself down before talking to others. When you are calmer and your mind is clearer, tell your partner about your feelings and have a constructive discussion. That means acknowledging to your partner how you are feeling instead of digging in your heels and sticking to your position.

Also look deep within yourself and if you see that you have many bad habits, be aware, and try to work on them. Discuss them with your partner, who is also your friend so that he or she can be supportive in your efforts to change and be a better person. In short, be careful not to repeat the bad habits or the negativities that you may have seen in your parents' relationship.



What is Buddhism's view on premarital sex?

The Buddha did not specify anything about this issue. The social institution of marriage was very different during the Buddha's time. Marriages were arranged by the family and were for the purpose of raising children. Men had multiple wives or concubines and this was acceptable then. In Tibet, a woman may

marry brothers; this kept the land in one family. These types of marriages are not acceptable in terms of our current cultural mores.

In terms of premarital sex, I think if people are responsible and take care not to harm themselves or others either physically or mentally, premarital sex is acceptable. However, I believe this should happen within a relationship of mutual respect and care. Using people for one's own sexual enjoyment or to bolster one's ego is certainly not an act of kindness! People who have casual sex may think it's okay and that there's no detrimental effect. But if they look more deeply at their state of mind in the long term, they will see that it does have a deleterious effect. Similarly, meeting someone and having sex with that person early in the relationship usually causes a lot of confusion and pain for both parties. In addition, people should use birth control if they do not wish to have a child.



What are the Buddhist views on abortion and teenage pregnancy?

The Buddha did not discuss teenage pregnancy. During his time, most teenage girls were married, something which is not the case now.

In American society, there is a huge debate between those who favour pro-choice and those who favour pro-

life. Each side says their position is right and attacks the other. Each group says their view is right because they care the most about others. However, I do not see much caring or compassion in this debate. Rather, both the pro-lifers and the pro-choicers are angry. Neither has much compassion, which is unfortunate, because in the case of unwanted pregnancy, compassion is direly needed. Everyone in the situation needs compassion — the mother, the father, the child and the society. An unwanted pregnancy is difficult for everybody. Rather than having a judgmental attitude, we need to bring compassion to the forefront.

From a Buddhist viewpoint, life starts at the time of conception. Thus abortion is taking life. But condemning people who aborted their babies does not benefit anyone. We need to give the parents, or at least the mother, support and understanding in the case of an unwanted pregnancy. If we do, there will be a greater chance for the child to be born. Then, the baby can be adopted or given to another family to raise. If as a society, we can give support rather than judgmental criticism, it could help save the lives of those children. I say this because it has touched my life directly. My parents adopted my younger sister when she was a newborn. She was the result of an unwanted pregnancy. But instead of having an abortion, her natural mother gave birth. Because of that, I am able to have a sister whom I love very much, and I am very grateful for that.

Here we have to look at the issue of teens being sexually active. They learn to use sexuality responsibly in two ways. First, adults must be a model of wise sexual conduct. That means both parents are faithful to each other and do not have extramarital relationships with other people. Second, parents must discuss sex and birth control with their children, or if they do not feel comfortable doing so, they should ask other adults to do so.

If parents simply say, “Don’t have sex, and we don’t want to talk about it any further”, then from where or whom will teenagers learn? From magazines, from television programmes, from all the stories they hear from their friends! They will not learn good values that way. Adults need to give them good and accurate information and not be shy about it.

Another factor that encourages teens to use their sexuality wisely is an atmosphere of love and acceptance at home. If they don’t feel loved and accepted by their parents, sex becomes more appealing because at least then somebody is caring about them. It’s very difficult to tell teens who don’t feel loved or accepted, “Don’t have sexual relations”, because they desperately want to feel close to other human beings.

Emotionally, teenagers crave affection. In addition, the hormones in their bodies cause sexual desire to arise. Both of these factors contribute to their sexual activity. If people create a more loving environment within families where parents talk with their teenagers

and spend time with them — instead of just bossing their children around and nagging at them — the children will feel supported by and bonded to their family. Then they won't have as much emotional need to be sexually active.



I am a therapist and have several Chinese clients. When I ask them, “Have you communicated with your teenage children about sex?” they say, “We never touch the subject, because if we tell them about birth control, they will do more”.

Although some people think in this way, I do not believe this is the case. Each of us has lived through adolescence. I don't think learning about birth control would propel one to be more sexually active. Rather, it would make one more responsible. Accurate information about sexual functions and birth control enables teens and young adults to think more clearly about these issues beforehand. They will take proper precautions and think about situations before they happen. For example, they will know that even if they use birth control, pregnancy could still occur. That could make them check, “Am I ready to become a parent?” and “Do I care about this other person enough to share parenthood with him or her?” By thinking about these things, they will learn to discriminate and make good choices.

What does Buddhism say about divorce? How can we use Buddhist teachings to handle the emotional upheaval in our children and ourselves that occurs during a divorce?

Marriage and divorce are secular affairs in Buddhism. If lay people wish to marry, that is their choice. If they wish to divorce, that is also their choice.

Preventing divorce by preparing well for marriage is best. The movies present an unrealistic vision of romantic relationships that lead people to have many unrealistic expectations. It's better to see marriage as a partnership, not as a romantic fling that is supposed to last forever. Take your time to know someone well — seeing the person in many different situations and at different times — before getting married and starting a family. Conflict is natural, so develop good communication and conflict resolution skills together. See your spouse as precious, and nurture the good qualities in him or her.

Divorce is painful for the people involved, and it takes time to grieve. Usually one person is ready to move on and the other isn't, so patience and tolerance are needed. If the couple has children, it is important not to speak badly about one's ex-spouse, because that will adversely affect the children. You may not have a life-long connection with your ex-spouse, but your child will have a life-long connection with both parents. Don't put the children in the middle, making them side with one parent against the other. Instead

work with your ex-spouse to create a good atmosphere for the children.

One person told me that keeping the five lay precepts and being mindful to avoid the ten destructive actions helped her so much during her divorce. Instead of getting drunk to numb the pain, she faced the situation. Instead of lying and exaggerating what her spouse did, she was fair and honest. Mindful to avoid criticising her spouse to other people, she watched her speech. She really appreciated and relied on her Buddhist practice to weather the ups and downs of the divorce.

DHARMA AND THE FAMILY

How can Buddhism help our family life?

The principal way Buddhism can help a family is by each family member practising the Dharma. By learning the Buddha's teachings, contemplating them, and putting them into practice as well as one can, we benefit and so does the entire family. The Dharma is full of teachings that describe how to deal with emotions, how to generate love, compassion and wisdom. By learning these, we become happier and more peaceful. We are easier to get along with and more patient. We become better listeners. If we develop the qualities the Buddha teaches us, it affects the family in a wonderful way.

If both partners hold the Dharma as the centre of their relationship, their relationship will be more satisfying. That is, both partners are determined to live ethically and to develop their loving-kindness towards all beings impartially. Then they will support each other to grow and to practise. For example, when one partner becomes discouraged or starts to neglect his or her Dharma practice, the other can help him or her get back on track through gentle encouragement and open discussion. If the couple have children, they can arrange for each other to have time for quiet reflection as well as time with the children. It is also important for the parents to spend time together, without the children.

Although raising children is time-intensive, parents should not see this as antithetical to Dharma practice. They can learn a lot about themselves from their children and they can help each other work through the challenges of parenthood in the light of Buddhist values.

Influenced by contemporary trends in psychology, many people have come to attribute most of their problems to childhood experiences. However, if this is done with an attitude of blame — “I have problems because of what my parents did when I was a child.” — it sets the stage for them to feel guilty and fearful that they will damage their own children when they have families. This kind of anxiety is not conducive to healthy child-rearing or to feeling compassion for

ourselves. Viewing our childhood as if it were an illness that we have to recover from only damages us as well as our children.

Although we cannot ignore detrimental influences from childhood, it is just as important to pay attention to the kindness and benefit we have received from our families. No matter what our situation was when we were growing up, we were the recipients of much kindness from others. Remembering this, we allow ourselves to feel the gratitude that naturally arises for those who have helped us. If we do, we can also pass that same kindness and care onto our children.

Family harmony is extremely important. If adults see the main purpose of marriage as pleasure, then arguments and the break-up of the family come about more easily. As soon as people don't get as much pleasure as they want, discontent sets in, quarrels ensue, and the marriage collapses. Many people go on to have numerous partners, but still fail to find satisfaction. This is a clear example of the way in which clinging to one's own pleasure brings pain to oneself and others.

However, if people see marriage and family as a long-term opportunity to grow and to support others, they will feel more satisfied and content. When their minds are happy, they automatically act in kinder ways and the other members of the family will naturally reciprocate.

I have children. How can I meditate or say prayers in the morning when they need my attention?

One way is to get up earlier than your children. Another idea is to invite your children to meditate or chant with you. Once I was staying with my brother's family. My niece, who was about six or seven at that time, used to come into my room because we were the first two to wake up in the morning. Because I was reciting prayers or meditating then, I explained to her that that was the time when I am quiet and do not want to be disturbed. She would come into the room, and sometimes she would draw. Other times, she would sit on my lap. Several times she asked me to sing to her, and I would chant prayers and mantras out loud. She really liked this and we had a very nice time together.

It is very good for children to see their parents sit still and be calm. That gives them the idea that maybe they too can do the same. If Mum and Dad are always busy, running around, talking on the phone, stressed out, or collapsing in front of the TV, the kids will also be like this. Is this what you want for your children? If you want your children to learn certain attitudes or behaviours, you have to cultivate them yourselves. Otherwise, how will your children learn? If you care about your children, you have to care about yourself as well and be mindful of living a healthy and balanced life for their benefit as well as for your own.

You can also teach your children how to make offerings to the Buddha and how to recite simple

prayers and mantras. Once, I stayed with a friend and her three-year-old daughter. Every morning when we got up, we would all bow three times to the Buddha. Then, the little girl would give the Buddha a present — a cookie or some fruit — and the Buddha would give her a present also, a sweet or a cracker. It was very nice for the child, because at age three she was establishing a good relationship with the Buddha and at the same time was learning to be generous and share things. When my friend cleaned the house, did chores, or went places with her daughter, they would chant mantras together. The little girl loved the melodies of the mantras. This helped her because whenever she got upset or frightened, she knew she could chant mantras to calm herself down.



How can the Dharma help children? How can we teach the Dharma to children?

The essence of the Buddha's teachings is to avoid harming others and to help them as much as possible. These are values that both Buddhist and non-Buddhist parents want to instil in their children so that they can live harmoniously with others. Since children learn largely through example, the most effective way for parents to teach their children good values is to live them. Of course, this isn't always so easy! But if parents

try to practise well, their children will directly benefit from their example.

Growing up with Buddhism in the home helps children. If a family has a shrine, the children can keep it clean. The parents can then teach them how to make prostrations and offerings each morning and do these activities together with their children. It's a nice way for parents to connect with their children on a spiritual level from the time the children are very young.

Children like music, and the melodies of prayers, mantras and Buddhist songs can take the place of the usual commercial jingles and nursery rhymes. Many parents chant mantras to their babies when the infants are upset or tired, and the babies react positively to the gentle vibration. In one family I know, the five-year-old son leads the prayer when they offer their food before eating. These are simple yet profound ways for parents and children to share the Dharma.

Several Buddhist families could gather together on a weekly or monthly basis to practise together. Rather than just taking the kids to Sunday school and letting someone else teach them, practising together provides the opportunity for the parents and children to spend some peaceful time together apart from their harried schedules. It also enables Buddhist families to meet and support one other. When the children are young, the practice could be short followed by a picnic or another playful activity.

Parents and children can also do the breathing

meditation together. Ask the children to breath deeply and experience the feeling. Then tell them to breathe quickly and ask if they felt any difference. Visualising the Buddha and Bodhisattva Guanyin and reciting the mantra while imagining peaceful light flowing from the Enlightened One into oneself and all sentient beings is another short meditation that children can engage in. This helps children learn how to calm themselves, which is a very important skill to have in life.

Parents and school-age children can role-play together, creating a scene in which all the characters think of their own happiness above others' and then replaying it with one of the characters thinking of others' happiness. Such activities teach children problem-solving and allow them to see the results of different behaviours. Families could also visit Buddhist temples and centres in the community together and talk about what they see there.

Reading Buddhist children's books and watching Buddhist videos are other activities parents can share with their children. There is an excellent cartoon video of the Buddha's life, and many children's Dharma books. Informal discussions with children can be both amusing and instructive, and parents may be surprised just how open their children are to concepts such as rebirth, karma and kindness to animals.

Many parents exclaim, "My child can't sit still!" My guess is that these children have seldom seen their parents sit peacefully either! When children see

an adult sitting peacefully, they get the idea that they can do that as well. Sometimes, a parent's quiet time can be shared with their children. For example, a child can sit on his or her parent's lap while the parent recites mantras. Other times, parents may want to be undisturbed when they meditate, and children learn to respect their parents' wish for some quiet time.

Discussion groups work well with teenagers. An adult can facilitate a discussion about friendship, gossip, dating or other topics of concern to teenagers. A discussion could also centre on applying Buddhist principles of non-violence and generosity to current events. This is an excellent way for teens to learn more about the world and people in other countries. The beauty of Buddhism is that its principles can apply to every aspect of life. The more children see the relevance of ethical values and loving-kindness to their lives, the more they will value those traits.

Once I led a discussion group for 20 teenagers about boy-girl relationships. Each person spoke in turn, and although they were ostensibly talking about their lives and feelings, there was a lot of Dharma in what they said. For example, they brought out the importance of living ethically, speaking the truth, and learning when and how to trust. As the facilitator, I didn't teach or preach. I just listened and respected what they said. Afterwards some of them came up to me and said, "Wow! That's the first time we've ever talked about that with a nun!" Not only were they able to talk openly in

the presence of an adult about a sensitive topic, they also understood that religious people are aware and sympathetic to teenagers' concerns. In addition, they saw the relevance of Dharma to their lives.



How can we introduce children to meditation?

Children are often curious when they see their parents do their daily meditation practice. This can be an opportunity to teach them a simple breathing meditation. Children enjoy sitting quietly alongside their parents for five or ten minutes. When their attention span sags, they can quietly get up and go into another room while the parents continue to meditate. If parents find this too disturbing, they can do their daily practice privately and meditate together with their youngsters at another time.

Children can also learn visualisation meditation. Most children love to pretend and can easily imagine things. Parents can teach their children to imagine the Buddha, made of light. Then, while light radiates from the Buddha into them and all the beings around them, they can chant the Buddha's mantra. If a child has a sick relative, friend, or pet or if a friend is having problems, the child could visualise that person specifically and imagine the Buddha sending light to him or her. In that way, children increase their

compassion and feel involved in helping those they care about.



**What if our children aren't interested in Buddhism?
Should we allow them to go to church with their
friends?**

Religion should not be forced on anyone. If children aren't interested in Buddhism, let them be. They can still learn how to be a kind person from observing their parents' attitudes and actions.

Classmates are likely to invite their friends to go to church with them. Because we live in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society, it is helpful for children to learn about other religions by making one visit to their friends' church or temple. Before they do so, we should prepare them by discussing the fact that people have different beliefs, and thus mutual respect and tolerance are important. But if your child goes to church with a friend, that friend should also be willing to visit a Buddhist temple with your child. Exchanges should be equal to avoid unwanted proselytising.

If you think that your child or teenager is being enticed or pressured to convert to his or her friend's faith, you should intervene early on. Explain what Buddhists believe and why. Describe ways in which Buddhist beliefs and values can help your children

with their daily life problems. Teach them how to answer their friends' questions about Buddhism and instruct them how to question the beliefs held by other religions. In short, teach your children how to think for themselves.



How can we have good relationships with our children, especially when they are teenagers?

Having an open relationship with teenagers is important, and this depends on how parents relate to their children when they were young. This, in turn, depends on spending time with the children and on having a positive attitude towards them.

When parents are harried, they tend to see caring for their children as a hassle — yet another thing to take care of before they collapse after a hard day at work. Children detect this, often feeling that their parents don't care about them or don't have time for them even if they do care.

Setting priorities as to how you spend your time is essential in building good relationships with your children. If having the time to develop a close relationship with your children is a priority, then you may need to accept a job that pays less but has shorter hours or turn down a promotion that would increase family income but mean more stress and less time at home.

Love is more important to children than material possessions. Children need love and attention from their parents more than they need their own computer, iPod or TV. Choosing to earn more money at the expense of good family relations may mean having to spend that extra income later on therapy and counselling for both parents and children!

Talk to your teenagers about things they are interested in, whether or not those things interest you. Don't just talk to them about getting good grades and keeping their room clean. Talk to them about sports or the latest fashion. Keep the doors of communication open.



Do children need discipline? How do we do that without getting angry?

Children often provide the best — and the most difficult — opportunity to practise patience! For that reason, parents are advised to become familiar with the antidotes to anger that the Buddha taught.

Loving your children doesn't mean letting them do whatever they want or giving them everything they desire. That is, in fact, being cruel to children, for it allows them to develop bad habits, which makes it more difficult for them to get along with others. One of the most valuable skills parents need to teach their children

is how to deal with the frustration of not getting what they want. If children's wants are not reined in and they do not learn to be happy when their wishes aren't actualised, they will have difficulty getting along with others when they are adults. Of course, parents need to model with their behaviour how to be happy when their own wishes are not fulfilled.

Children need guidelines, limits and structure. They need to learn the results of different behaviours, and how to discriminate between what to do and what to abandon. Parents need to avoid letting their children pressure them into buying things that they do not need or engaging in activities that the children do not yet have the maturity to handle. However, just saying, "No!" doesn't educate the child on how to think in those situations. You must explain why when the child is old enough to understand.



**Contentment is an essential Buddhist principle.
How can we teach it to children?**

The attitude of contentment enables us to enjoy life more and experience more satisfaction. I believe one reason children are discontented is that they are given too many choices about their sense pleasures. From a young age, they are asked, "Do you want apple juice or orange juice?" "Do you want to watch this TV show or

that one?” “Do you want this kind of bicycle or that?” “Do you want a red toy or a green one?”

Children — not to mention adults — become confused by being bombarded with so many choices. Instead of learning to be content with whatever they have, they are constantly forced to think, “Which thing will bring me the most happiness? What else can I get to make me happy?” This increases their greed and confusion.

Remedying this doesn't mean that parents become authoritarian. Rather, they place less emphasis on the importance of material possessions in the home. Of course, this also depends on parents altering the ways they themselves relate to sense pleasures and material possessions. When parents cultivate contentment, their children will find it easier to do so as well.



My teenagers constantly come home late. As a parent, I know I can't control it, but how do I tell myself this is not the result of my irresponsible actions?

As a parent, you nurtured your child from the time he or she was helpless and completely dependent on you. At that time, you were responsible for every aspect of the baby's life. But as your child grows up and becomes more independent, he or she gradually assumes that

responsibility and you are no longer responsible for every aspect of his or her life. Letting go of this is one of the challenges of parenting.

As parents, you want your children to be happy and not to suffer. Thus you teach them skills to deal with different situations. But you can't follow them around their whole lives to protect them from suffering. That's impossible, and you would be pretty miserable too! Would you want to follow your teenager around 24 hours a day? Our parents wanted us to be happy, but they had to let us live our own lives. They taught us skills, and in spite of all the mistakes we have made, we have managed to stay alive. We have dealt with our mistakes, learned from them and moved on. That will happen to your children too.

It is hard to watch somebody you love — your child, spouse, parent, friend — make a mistake. Sometimes there is nothing we can do to prevent it. We just have to be there and help them learn from their mistake.

Parents sometimes go to extremes in dealing with their teenagers who don't want to listen. One extreme is becoming like a drill sergeant, harassing children with endless questions about where they are going, whom they are with, and the exact time they will be home. Teenagers perceive this as infringing on their autonomy and are likely to rebel even more.

Another extreme is letting the child come and go as he or she wishes, treating the home like a hotel and leaving their parents to do their laundry, clean

up after them and provide meals. This can be avoided by teaching children from young that family members depend on one other. Give them duties to perform at home. As they grow older, let them be responsible for doing the laundry, cleaning the house and preparing the food. These tasks should not be delegated to daughters only. It is equally important for sons to learn to take care of themselves.

DHARMA GUIDANCE ON WORLD EVENTS

How should we view terrorist attacks like September 11 and their repercussions in a Buddhist light? How do we handle the fear, anxiety and anger that arise in us as individuals and as a society in reaction to such attacks? (This section was written just a few months after the attack in 2001. What is said here applies equally to the war in Iraq and other conflicts.)

It seems to me that Southeast Asians have a different kind of fear and anxiety compared to Americans as a result of the attacks. Asians' fears are mostly economic, while in the States, the fear is for one's life. Americans

are afraid there will be a bio-terrorist or dirty bomb attack in which many people die.

When we are afraid and anxious, our mind is immersed in thoughts of horrible events that could happen in the future. We start imagining worst-case scenarios and convince ourselves that they will happen. Then we become worried and terrified that the dramas our mind has invented will occur. But, at that moment, none of the things we are imagining has happened yet. They may not happen. There is no sense in making ourselves upset and anxious worrying that they will. The way to deal with these unpleasant emotions is to realise that our mind is creating stories. These stories are not reality. We have to come back to the present moment and be aware of what is happening now.

Even if the worst-case scenarios that we have imagined do happen, we are not totally without resources to deal with them. When we investigate, we find that we have some material or mental resources that we can apply should such events occur. Sometimes the resources are external, for example, we may know people who can help us or communities that provide assistance. But most importantly, we have our own internal resources. We have inner strength that can be called forth to deal with tragedies in creative and constructive ways. Through Buddhist practice and meditation, we develop these internal resources, so that when we meet with adversity, we can handle it without falling apart. To develop these inner resources, we must

learn the Buddha's teachings and contemplate them well in advance of the difficult situation. We have to train our mind beforehand. It is like taking an exam; we have to study well. We can't walk into the exam room unprepared and expect to do well.

Tibetan Buddhism has a series of teachings called "mind training" or "thought transformation" (*lojong*). These thought transformation texts explain methods to transform adversities into the path. I have had the fortune to have studied these and try to practise them. To help my mind deal with adversities, I meditate on karma as well as on love and compassion. When reflecting on karma I think that whatever happens — happiness or suffering — is the result of my own previous actions. Therefore it is senseless to blame others or be upset about what I experience. Rather, I must learn from the situation and make a strong determination to avoid the negative actions that cause suffering. When meditating on love and compassion, I think that the sentient beings that harm me also want to be happy and avoid suffering, and that they are doing harmful actions because they are miserable. In this way, I cultivate a kind heart towards them, and a kind and caring heart towards others has the side effect of lessening my own misery.

To return to the topic of the anxiety that Southeast Asians have as a result of September 11, people here are worried about their own rice bowl. They aren't so concerned with the refugees starving in Afghanistan

or with Americans dying of anthrax. They are dreaming up scenes of a plunging economy and making themselves anxious about their own livelihood. This is a narrow outlook. By focusing only on their own financial concerns, they increase their own fear. If they broaden their horizon to see the situation of the whole world, then their own economic issues would appear in a more realistic perspective.

For example, consider the economic fears of Afghan peasants who have loaded most of their possessions on the back of a donkey and have set out with their children into the barren landscape. Their land has had a famine for several years, and now bombs are falling on it. They are refugees and hope to find some kindly people who will give them food, medicine and a place to stay. These people have no idea where they are going or what will happen to them. Is such a situation likely to happen here in Malaysia or Singapore? I don't think so. Even though there may be some economic slowdown here, you are not going to face anything close to the problems of the Afghan refugees or so many other impoverished people on our planet. You will still have your flat; your family will not face violent attacks; your country will not dissolve into chaos. You may not be able to travel abroad or eat so much delicious food at home, but your suffering would be mild compared to those of others. If you look at your own situation that way, you will realise that your problems are not that bad and that you can handle them.

A lot of times, our fears and anxiety are moulded by what we see in newspapers and on CNN. Southeast Asia exports many goods to America, and a shrinkage of the economy would result in many people losing their jobs. This is for real. When people lose their jobs, they have a lot to fear. How do you deal with those fears that the media constantly bombard us with?

One way is to not watch the media! The media creates a hype that makes people unnecessarily anxious. We must develop discriminating wisdom to deal with the media — to know what is accurate and what is exaggeration, what is balanced reporting and what is slanted.

As I mentioned before, we have to put our fear in perspective. The economic fears that you have in Singapore and Malaysia are nowhere near the fears that people have in impoverished countries. You may lose your job here but you are not going to starve. People from other parts of the world are actually losing their lives and are starving right now.

Our self-centred attitude works in such a way that any problem concerning us seems incredibly horrible and dangerous. In the meantime, our self-centred attitude makes us ignore the suffering of others who are a lot worse off than we are. When we broaden our perspective and realise that everyone equally wants happiness and wants to be free from suffering, then we stop thinking only of ourselves. A broad

perspective relaxes our mind and frees us from the self-preoccupation that is so stifling and painful.

If you want to prevent poverty in the future, practise generosity now. We have so much; wouldn't it be wonderful if we donate to a charity that cares for refugees and others who suffer due to war?

Another way to reduce fear is recognise the good things we have going for us in our lives. For example, you may lose your jobs, but thank goodness you are not going to starve. Your country has lots of delicious food. You still have your family; you are not under any threat of imminent attack. You may have to pare down and do without some things which you are used to, but that's doable. External things aren't the source of happiness, are they? Isn't that why we are seeking Nirvana, so we can go beyond attachment to material possessions, which aren't capable of bringing us ultimate happiness?

Can we see the silliness and laugh at how our limited mind works? For example, we call ourselves Buddhists and profess much devotion to the Dharma, but, we are much more afraid of losing our jobs in this life than of where we might be born in future lives. Does this attitude correspond to what the Buddha taught? We say we believe in karma, but when it comes to abandoning negative actions so that we will not be born in a bad rebirth, we forget about karma. Our limited mind thinks, "Future life is so far away, but losing my job is real suffering". If we lose our job,

the suffering lasts only for a period of years. When we leave this life, the suffering of losing our job is over. But if we do not engage in positive actions that create the cause for happiness in future lives, we could have a lot more suffering then. If we think about this and broaden our perspective, we won't suffer now from worry and anxiety, and we won't suffer in the future because we have acted with kindness and generosity now.



The people who died in the September 11 tragedy probably died with a lot of fear. Does it mean they would have a bad rebirth?

We can't make a general statement. Some may have died in fear, but some may not. I hope some may have been able to calm their minds down and turned to positive thoughts and emotions.

Many different conditions come together to determine what our future life will be — what we are thinking about during the time we die is one of them. Others include 1) the karmas that are the strongest from our past, either from this life or previous lives, 2) the karmas or actions we have done repeatedly in our lives, because anything that's done repetitively is very likely to ripen at the time of death, 3) how diligently we practise when we are alive; what kind of causes we

create while we are alive, and 4) how well we are able to guide our mind at the time of death.

Since there are many different factors influencing the rebirth one takes, we can't say where each person who died in September 11 will be reborn. I think a number of people — the police and firemen, for example — had compassion and probably died with an altruistic attitude. They are likely to have a good rebirth. Therefore, it is going to differ from person to person. But it certainly makes us stop and ask ourselves, "If I were to face a situation like that suddenly, would I be able to generate a kind heart, or would my mind be so instantly filled with fear, anger and self-grasping?" Thinking like that inspires us to generate love and compassion and to practise the Dharma with sincerity.



How does karma play a part in an event that rivets the planet?

Each of us has created the karma to be where we were when the tragedy happened. Collective karma is karma we have created together with other people. We experience the result of collective karma together as a group. But within this group experience, we each have our own individual experience. The cause for that is called individual karma. Some people were in the

World Trade Centre, some were near by, and some in other countries.

Usually, in America, people are thinking and doing their own things. People have so many different experiences and viewpoints in the States. But when September 11 occurred, all of a sudden everybody was together on the same wavelength. I felt this sense of group karma, the result of which we experienced just by being in the same country. We experienced the grief together because everyone felt attacked — not just people in the World Trade Centre, not just those in New York, but everyone in the country felt the insecurity and fear afterwards.

The fact that our karma brought about that event doesn't mean anybody deserved to suffer. What happened was not a punishment. But suffering is a result of destructive karma, and such experiences are wake-up calls for us to lead ethical lives with kindness towards others.

Karma was at play in so many aspects of the September 11 event. Think about the karma that led certain people to be hijackers. What kind of actions did they do in previous lives that led them, in this lifetime, to be born in a situation where they were conditioned in such a way that they thought killing innocent people was something good? And what kind of karma did they create from putting effort into producing such pain? Thinking about the result they will experience from such actions is terrifying.

For me, there is a lot to learn from reflecting on the karma involved in this experience. For example, if I don't want to become a terrorist in my future life, I have to make sure that I do not create the causes for becoming one now. That means I have to take care that I do not start thinking like a terrorist right now — in other words, having all sorts of wrong views, thinking that violence is the way to solve problems, putting people in categories and dismissing them. That kind of thinking sets us up to think and act like a terrorist in a future life.

Furthermore, if we do not want to die prematurely, let's not create the karma that causes that to happen. One of the principal karma that causes premature death is killing or taking the lives of others. That means if we support or rejoice in any kind of killing, we are creating the karma to have a short life in the future. Understanding this, we will realise that any type of vengeful feelings or actions in response to harm we receive sets us up to experience suffering in future lives.

When we look at current events, we can see them in terms of previous actions that bring about certain results now. We can also reflect on the karma we create now that will bring results in the future. A further point is to reflect on the actions we are doing now that act as the conditions for past karma to ripen.

For example, the US World Trade Centre is the symbol of American prosperity. The twin buildings

project an image which says, “Look how rich and successful we are.” What is the motivation behind all that success? Why do we make a big display of it? Collective pride, arrogance and greed. The mind that’s greedy and arrogant is not a mind that leads to the sharing and equal distribution of wealth. Such a mind focuses on its own benefit and neglects the well-being of others. It seems to me that this attitude, when played out on an international level, contributed to what had happened. As an American, I think that as a country we are too enthralled with our prosperity and have not been generous enough to disadvantaged people and impoverished countries. When an individual or a nation behaves like that, of course others are going to be jealous. That doesn’t mean jealousy is good or that they have a right to kill innocent civilians. Nevertheless, we can understand how our attitudes and behaviour contributed to the arising of others’ resentment. Prosperous nations should be committed to help impoverished ones, because we are all human beings who want happiness and do not want suffering. We share the same planet.

I think the United States of America as a country needs to reconsider its foreign policy. We need to look at how we contribute to social, political, economic and military systems that harm people in other countries and in our own country. It is easy to become smug when we are prosperous and forget about sharing. It is easy to become arrogant and treat others disrespectfully when

we are affluent. We have to examine how much we and our social systems cater to that kind of mentality, and then take acts to correct them.



So does that mean one's past karma brings about our experiences, which in turn influence one to commit the same negative act again?

Right. The environment is related to our past actions, but it is also affected by what we are thinking now. If, as a society, we don't start to question our values and what we think, past destructive karma will have opportune situations to ripen. For example, if, in reaction to the violence of September 11, we become violent and revengeful, then we are creating the cause for violence to continue.

Because our mental afflictions run rampant, it is easy to react to suffering with anger and violence. In our confusion, we believe that retaliation will destroy the enemy. But the actual enemies are anger and hatred. For this reason, the Buddha said that hatred is not solved by hatred, but only by love.

But in speaking of the importance of love and compassion in the face of violent attacks and terrorism, it is important to understand that this doesn't mean we act like a doormat and let others do whatever they wish. Compassion is not an excuse to become like an ostrich

with our head in the ground, ignoring the reality of the situation. Responses are required and things need to be done. We need to be active, but wisely active, trying to address the situation with an open mind and a caring heart, even towards those who have harmed us.



How else can we help in response to the tragedy, other than making monetary contribution?

You can help on the material plane — donating blood for the injured, donating money for food and supplies. You may also choose to work actively by participating in and/or volunteering for international relief efforts. Another way you can help is through your prayers and practices. I think we need to help in both ways.

You may wonder how doing prayers and Dharma practices can help. First, it keeps us involved. Second, it is working to remedy suffering on a karmic level.

Doing *Tonglen*, also called the giving and taking practice, is very effective. Here we imagine taking on the suffering of others, using it to destroy our own self-centredness and then sending out happiness to others by imagining our body, possessions and merit transforming into whatever others need. The practice of Chenrezig (Guanyin) is also good, because Chenrezig is the Buddha of Compassion. Compassion is the opposite of hatred,

and hatred was the cause of this tragedy. Strong hatred needs to be counteracted by strong compassion and the practice of Guanyin is excellent for helping us to develop compassion.

All Dharma sessions begin with taking refuge in the Three Jewels and generating *bodhicitta*, the aspiration to attain full enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. We can bring current events into our practice of taking refuge and generating *bodhicitta*. In our refuge visualisation, imagine the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and spiritual masters in front of us. Imagine your mother on your left side and your father on your right, and you are surrounded by all sentient beings. Imagine the terrorists and the Taliban leaders in the space in front of you, sitting between you and the Buddhas. We are all facing the Buddha together, but to see the Buddhas we have to see the people that we don't approve of and are afraid of. Remember that they want happiness and not suffering. Despite that wish, due to mental afflictions, they harm so many people. Think about the karma they create and the suffering they will experience as a result. Here they are — human beings with the Buddha nature — but their ignorance and confusion make them create destructive karma that harms themselves and others. Contemplate that all of us are under the control of mental afflictions and karma; all of us keep taking rebirth in cyclic existence. In this way, generate compassion for all sentient beings, including ourselves, the victims of terrorist attacks and the terrorists. Then

think that we all turn to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha for spiritual guidance together and imagine that you lead them in taking refuge and generating love, compassion and *bodhicitta*.

Meditating like this helps us to see the terrorists as human beings and not generalise and dismiss them as useless and horrible. It keeps us engaged and having a big, open mind. This is important to prevent future tragedies due to ignorance, closed-mindedness and hatred. To prevent more of the same suffering, we have to work with our own mind and counteract our ignorance, confusion and hatred. Doing this visualisation of taking refuge with everybody all together helps us maintain an open and compassionate mind. If we start thinking in a closed-minded way, putting people into negative categories, thinking they are bad and deserve to suffer, then our minds become very similar to the minds of the terrorists. We need to prevent that.

Another way to help is by being open and listening to other people's feelings about what happened. We need to learn how to listen to different people's interpretation of what is going on, and to accept different people's emotional reactions towards what happened. We might hear judgmental and biased comments or extreme views, and we need to learn to listen and discern what these people are really trying to say. Perhaps they are expressing fear or insecurity; perhaps they are confused about how their traditional

society should approach modernity. We need to listen to people's genuine concerns, which can be challenging when they may not be clear themselves what their actual concerns are.

Regardless of which side they support, most people want to see a world with equal opportunities, economically and socially, where countries can govern themselves without being repressed by external powers. Everybody wants their own culture, language and religion to be respected and to continue to exist. Everybody wants peace so that their children do not have to grow up in the middle of warfare. Basically this is what we all want, although we might have different ideas of how to get there. It's important to come back to what everyone in the situation has in common.



The Buddha preached non-violence. How do we reconcile this with the concept of justice that the American government and many people internationally are demanding after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C.? Is revenge a solution? How can innocent victims be compensated for their loss and suffering?

I haven't heard the word "justice" used in Buddhism. I haven't read that word in the scriptures or heard it in a teaching. But some other major world religions speak

of “justice” a lot, and it’s a major concept or principle in those faiths.

What does “justice” mean? In listening to people use this word nowadays, it seems to mean different things to different people. For some, justice means punishment. In my experience, punishment doesn’t work. I work with prisoners in the States, and it is clear that punishment does not reform people who have nothing to lose to start with. In fact, punishment and disrespect only increase their defiance. Punishment doesn’t work with individuals, and I don’t think it works on an international level either. The Buddha never advocated punishment as in “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”. Instead, he encouraged compassion for both the victims and the perpetrators of harm. With compassion, we try to prevent people who could potentially do criminal and terrorist activities from harming others in the future.

If compensation for loss means revenge, then as Gandhi said, “An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind”. Revenge doesn’t work. It does not undo the past. It only provokes more anger, hatred and violence, which causes both sides to suffer more. If victims of a tragedy think that somebody else experiencing suffering will alleviate their grief, they haven’t understood their grief. When we want others to suffer and we rejoice in their pain, how do we feel about ourselves? Do we respect ourselves for wishing others to suffer? I don’t think so. It seems to me that in the long run, holding

grudges and cultivating vengeance only make us feel worse about ourselves. It neither relieves our grief nor pacifies dangerous situations.

If justice means preventing others from doing more harm, that makes a lot of sense. From a Buddhist perspective, those who have perpetrated great harm are suffering and have little control over their minds and emotions. They might harm others in the future. We have to prevent them from doing that for their own sake as well as for the sake of the potential victims. These people create tremendous negative karma when they harm others and will suffer greatly in future lives. Cultivating compassion for people on both sides — for the perpetrators and for the victims of terrorism — is extremely important. Motivated by compassion, we try to capture the people who perpetrated the terror and imprison them. We do this not because we want to punish them or make them suffer, but because we want to protect them from their own harmful attitudes and actions that damage themselves and others.

I am not saying that Buddhists advocate remaining passive when confronted with danger or harm. We can't just sit back and hope that it doesn't happen again. That does not make sense. We have to be pro-active in preventing future harm. We must find the people who support terrorism and stop their activities. But we do so motivated by compassion, not by hatred, anger or revenge. In addition, we must be honest about what we contributed to the situation and remedy that.

What can well-respected, famous religious leaders do to help the world situation and counteract this tendency towards revenge? What can we do as individuals?

It's good for religious leaders to guide their followers in a path of forgiveness and peace, combined with assertive action. Leaders of various faiths should meet together, listen to each other's needs and concerns, see what they agree on, and issue statements on the common ground. This would have a very settling effect on the general public. What I find so sad — and religious leaders are not immune from this — is that people grasp onto what is 'I', 'mine' and 'my side'. According to the Buddha's teachings, this grasping of 'mine' and 'I' is the source of cyclic existence and of all suffering. We can see this so clearly. We need to go beyond clinging to 'I' and 'mine'. If religious leaders can put in some effort to go beyond usual religious divisions, it would be most beneficial.

On the individual and grassroots levels, you can encourage one another and call for a non-violent approach. You can also volunteer to help other religious groups, especially those under threat due to terrorist attacks. For example, a Jewish Buddhist that I know went to help patrol a mosque in Seattle because the Muslims were afraid other Americans would attack it. Furthermore, as individuals, we should learn about and understand each other's religions.

How do we explain this to children so that they don't grow up with prejudice and/or fear and anxiety?

We should let children know that what happened was a tragic and rare event. If adults aren't anxious and speak with compassion for the perpetrators and the victims, children will not be afraid. Explain to children that all of us need to work together to resolve conflicts. Avoid teaching children there are good guys and bad guys, and that we should go out and kill the bad guys. That just makes them see the world as a fearful place.



How can the Dharma help in the healing process of those whose loved ones were killed in wars, terrorist attacks, natural disasters or accidents?

I would use Dharma principles differently depending upon whether I was advising Buddhists or non-Buddhists. For Buddhists, reflecting on karma and impermanence is very helpful. I would not suggest teaching this to non-Buddhists at a time when they are grieving, because they may not understand the Buddhist perspective on karma properly and misinterpret it to think someone was fated to suffer or deserved to suffer. This clearly is a wrong understanding that could be damaging to them.

For those who properly understand karma and its

results, reflecting that our own previous actions create our present experiences eases the grief. Personally, I find this very helpful, for then I stop blaming others and feeling sorry for myself. Rather, I have renewed energy to avoid acting destructively and to purify my previously created negative karma. It also inspires me to reduce my self-centredness in the future because my own selfishness made me create the negative karma, the painful results of which I am now experiencing.

For non-Buddhists and Buddhists alike, I would advise rejoicing that we had whatever time we did have with those people we love. We know that nothing lasts forever and that separation from the people we love will occur at one time or another. There is no way to prevent this, since we have mortal bodies. Even the Buddha lost his loved ones, and he himself passed away.

When separation or death occurs, we are not grieving for the past but for the future which we wanted to happen that is now not going to happen. In other words, we had a vision of what we would like the future to be with our loved ones and now it will not be actualised because they have died. So we are grieving for the future, not for the past. If we think about this, we realise that we do not need to grieve for the future because the future hasn't happened yet. The future is actually an open, creative potential. Just because the future we had in mind will not happen, it doesn't mean we have to suffer. We have a lot going for us in our lives, and we can create a positive future even if our loved ones are absent.

We can also look at the past and say, “I was so fortunate to have known that person for the time that I knew them.” We were extraordinarily fortunate to have known and have had good relationships with the people we cherished and who are meaningful in our lives. Even though those relationships do not last forever, we can rejoice that we had the time we did have with them. We can appreciate that and feel in our hearts the richness that we received from knowing those people. Instead of mourning, let’s rejoice at the love and goodness that we experienced with them. Now we will go forward in our lives and share what we received with other people. We will share the love we have received from our loved ones with others. We will now share with others the kindness that our dear ones brought out in us. By shifting our attitude in this way, we will be able to accept the change.



With such a perspective, do you think some good result can be derived from the terrorist attacks, such as the September 11 attack?

Good things can definitely come out of the present situation. My hope is that my country — individual Americans as well as the government — will reflect on our past actions and examine what we have done to contribute to other people’s feelings of hostility

towards us. Doing this, we may see how our consumer mentality, our oil-driven economy, and arrogance as a superpower have contributed to the ill-will that led to the terrorist attacks. I'm not saying the attacks were justified; the killing of thousands of people is never justified. But as much as we can see the ways in which we contributed to the causes that brought them about, that much we can begin to change and improve our relationships with others.

I hope Americans will see that they need to make greater effort to establish good relationships with Islamic countries. I hope the government will realise its arrogance in backing out of the Kyoto Agreement on the environment and the missile treaty with Russia and in not paying its dues to the United Nations. Hopefully, government leaders will see that it is not right for one country to act on its own, for the world is an inter-related international community. Hopefully, the countries that harbour terrorist cells will also re-evaluate their actions and seek other means to protest oppression or exploitation. As a planet, we need to re-evaluate the consumerist view that "more is better", and how that view creates miserliness, jealousy and inequality. This, too, contributes to others' hostility. Wealthy individuals and nations need to share more with others in their own and other nations. Such sharing is to everyone's advantage, because it promotes peace.

Do you think that some Buddhists may suffer from a fundamentalist view of Buddhism?

I have met some Buddhists who have been very emphatic about the correctness of their Buddhist tradition to the point of criticising others. Thankfully none of them has been extreme enough to resort to violence. But, as Buddhists, we should not be arrogant and say we do not need to worry about this. Whenever we see faults in others, we must examine ourselves to see if we have them too. One point in our favour is that Buddhist teachings are very clear that killing is not acceptable. We hear stories of high-level bodhisattvas who took life, but they had compassion for both the victim and for the perpetrator and were willing to experience the negative karmic results of killing. But those exceptions concern the few individuals who are highly realised bodhisattvas and do not pertain to the rest of us. For the rest of us, killing is detrimental.

We need to take care that sectarianism does not arise within Buddhist groups, for sectarianism is a kind of fundamentalism. We must avoid getting locked into sectarian views claiming “my teacher is the best teacher,” “my Buddhist tradition is the best one”, “everybody should practise the meditation practice I do”, and “everybody should keep morality the way I keep morality”. Such attachment is the source of fundamentalism. The Buddha spoke of grasping as being the root of suffering. Clinging to our own views of the Dharma is one form of grasping. We equate our

views with ourselves and then defend them to death, thinking, “I am right and they are wrong!”

Our judgmental mind likes to say, in absolute terms, that this is right and that is wrong; this is good and that is bad. And of course, we arrogantly think that we are always on the side of what’s right and good, never on the side of what’s wrong and bad!

The Buddha was an incredibly skilful teacher who gave different teachings to different disciples because people have different interests, dispositions and capabilities. The Buddha knew that one method wouldn’t fit all, just as there isn’t one food that suits everyone. Therefore, within his teachings, there are a variety of practices and methods to chose from. All of them relate back to the Four Noble Truths, and if we understand this, we see that none of them contradicts the others. If we really have faith in the Buddha, we must be open-minded, because the Buddha himself taught such tolerance and appreciation of diversity.

Worldwide, different religions will exist because not everybody has the same interests and dispositions. From a Buddhist view, such multiplicity of religion is beneficial, for everyone can find a spiritual path that suits him or her. All genuine religions teach non-harmfulness and compassion. It is only when a religious teaching is distorted by ignorant people that fundamentalism arises. True religious practitioners of all faiths cultivate ethical discipline, non-harmfulness, compassion and love.

We live in this world where each person's action has a reaction. This interdependent relationship has resulted in the terrorist attacks in America having an impact on us in other parts of the world. How we perceive things will also have an impact on their reaction. Do you think the inter-religious dialogues could clear some of these misunderstandings? What role can Buddhists play in this area?

Inter-religious dialogue is an important element. First of all, people need accurate information about other religions. After September 11, bookstores in the States reported that all books on Islam were sold out. People realised they did not know about Islam and wanted to learn. In addition to reading, we need to meet people who practise other faiths, so we can talk to one another and even practise together. A few months ago, I took part in a retreat with a Catholic monk, a Muslim Sufi and a Theosophist. We took turns leading meditation and had panel discussions about our beliefs, practices and communities. Everyone found this useful. We learned not only about one another's practice, but also about how our communities operate. Such activities reduce friction among people, because we understand one another and see that everyone means well and is struggling with similar problems.

No country on this planet is homogenous. Each one has several minority populations, so accurate knowledge about one another and tolerance are essential for a

nation to be peaceful internally. Since every government must consider its minority populations, fostering dialogues between the majority and the various minorities is essential, not only for harmony in the country, but also for harmony internationally. Malaysia and Singapore, for example, are pluralistic societies. America has people of so many different religions and origins. About 20 percent of Israeli citizens are Arabs. Half of the population living in Jordan is Palestinian. In Lebanon, part of the population is Christian and part is Muslim. Everywhere we go, we find countries with diverse internal populations. For us to function together, citizens and governments have to be aware and sensitive to this diversity. Much can be done at the grassroots level to get people talking to one another. Hence inter-religious dialogues are extremely important, and it would be wonderful if the media aired more programmes of such nature.

Although differences exist among religions, we don't have to quarrel about them. We can still respect others, even though they differ from us in certain aspects. The media should show religious leaders talking to one another with respect and interest. People follow the example of their leaders, and the media have the responsibility to foster harmony in society, not just to report on quarrels.



What is your view on the destruction of the Buddha images in Bamiyan, Afghanistan?

In 1973, I visited Afghanistan and saw the beautiful 150 feet tall Buddha statues carved in the side of the mountain in Bamiyan. Their destruction was a loss not only for Buddhists but also for the world. These statues were not only religious items, but were also great artistic and historical artefacts. It is admirable that as Buddhists, we did not riot or attack anyone when our holy artefacts were destroyed. Our non-violent response did not indicate fear or weakness on our part; it demonstrated that we do not believe in retaliation or inflicting harm on others. Although we shouldn't boast about this, we do need to point out to the world that we handled this peacefully. It may set an example so that other people will see that non-violence is more productive as a response. On the other hand, we do need to speak out and point out the destruction of these sacred objects so that damage to sacred artefacts of any religion can be prevented in the future.

Attachment to the statues could have caused us to lose our peace of mind and do actions that created more suffering. Violating the Buddhist principle of non-harmfulness in order to protect Buddhist statues would have been completely contradictory!



How do we develop love and compassion for those who have caused us so much pain and suffering?

It is easy to feel angry when we are harmed. When members of Dharma Friendship Foundation, our centre in Seattle, met that fateful evening of September 11, some said they were angry about the attacks. I believe that underneath the anger are other emotions such as fear and helplessness. These feelings are very uncomfortable, and we often do not know how to deal with them. Anger gives us a false sense of power and courage. As dangerous and painful as anger is, it makes us feel powerful, even though that power is false.

When we get angry and blame others, we put them in a category. We give them a label: “evil-doer”, “terrorist”, or “scum of the earth” and then think we know everything about them. For example, we developed an image that Osama Bin Laden is 100% evil. We don’t see him as a human being, but as a stereotype. It’s as if we thought he came out of his mother’s womb as an adult who was a terrorist! But he didn’t; he was an adorable baby, just like the rest of us were. He was once a toddler learning to walk. He was not a terrorist from the beginning of his life.

Looking deeper, we see that there are many more aspects of his life than just being a terrorist. He had some good qualities. I think he must have shown kindness to his family and to the people around him. Of course, it is partial kindness, not universal kindness towards all beings, but is our kindness impartial and universal?

From the Buddhist viewpoint, he, and everyone else we don't like, have Buddha nature. We cannot say someone with the potential to become a fully enlightened Buddha is inherently and irredeemably evil. We can speak about a person's actions and say they are harmful and destructive. However, we have to separate the action from the person; the action may be harmful but we cannot say the person is evil. Why? Because the fundamental nature of a person's mind is untainted by defilements, and thus he or she can become a fully enlightened Buddha.



But who is the “person”?

That is a different topic altogether that could form a separate interview! When we see that the fundamental nature of someone's mind is pure, it helps us let go of our rigid categories and labels. We can differentiate the action from the person. Then it's possible to feel compassion towards the person who is creating this negative action because we realise that he wants to be happy and free from suffering in the same way that we want to be happy and free from suffering. There is absolutely no difference between us.

Take a terrorist, criminal, or even a person at our workplace that we don't like as an example. Each of them wants to be happy and avoid suffering. We and

they are totally equal in that regard. There is no way one can say my happiness is more important than others' or my suffering hurts more than others'. When we understand that being happy is the fundamental wish of every sentient being, we know something very important about everyone and can see beyond his or her negative actions. Looking inside ourselves, we see that we want to be happy and free from suffering, yet we still act destructively due to our ignorance, confusion, anger, attachment, jealousy and arrogance. Likewise, other people do harmful actions because they, too, are confused, just like we are. People do not harm others because they are happy. Nobody wakes up in the morning, full of joy and says, "I feel so good I think I am going to hurt somebody today" (laugh).

Nobody hurts people when they are happy. People hurt others because they are not happy. They hurt others because they are miserable and confused. When we understand that is why the terrorists did what they did, we can have compassion for them. That does not mean we say what they did was right, good or acceptable. Their actions were abominable. Their actions harmed thousands of people, affected the entire world, and created incredible negative karma that will cause the terrorists to experience suffering in horrible rebirths for a long time.

Thus we can have compassion for them and wish them to have happiness. At first, it may seem odd or even inappropriate to wish those who perpetrated

such harm to be happy. But if we think about it, if the terrorists were happy, they would not be doing terrorist activities. In wishing them to be happy, we don't necessarily wish them to have everything they think will make them happy. Many times we human beings think something will make us happy when it won't. For example, wishing an alcoholic to be happy does not mean we wish him to have all the liquor he wants, even if he thinks that is going to make him happy. Rather, we wish him to be free of dependency on alcohol or any other substance. We wish him to have self-confidence and awareness of his beautiful inner potential so that he does not seek to medicate his pain by using alcohol or drugs. Similarly, we want the terrorists to have happiness, but not the false happiness that comes from perpetrating or rejoicing at terrorist activities. Instead, we want them to have a correct understanding of their own religion, to develop kindness towards all beings, to have a sense of their own virtuous potential, and to have a constructive purpose in life.

I believe young people who are attracted to terrorism do so because they do not see a purpose in their lives. They do not see a higher goal. People in many nations find modernity hard to adjust to. It took the Western world centuries to adapt to it, and Western history was anything but peaceful. Similarly, people in Islamic nations are trying to adapt to modernity after being colonised and having had their land arbitrarily divided into nations by European powers. They tried socialism

as a unifying force, and it didn't work. Neither did nationalism. Young people are looking for a goal that is beyond their own personal interest, a purpose that feels worthwhile. For some, capitalism and consumerism are the goals, but those are hollow and self-centred, even though many Southeast Asians and Westerners think they bring happiness. So when these people are presented with a purpose, even if it is a distorted purpose such as one put forth by fundamentalist Islam or Communism, they are attracted to it. I believe that all of us need to stop and ask ourselves, "What is a positive purpose in life? What will give our lives meaning without being harmful to others?"

After the terrorist attack in New York, there were backlashes in which Middle Eastern minority groups in the States were targeted for revenge. Perhaps unconsciously put forth by the media or simply due to people's ignorance, a concept was created that Middle Eastern minorities are terrorists. Do you think that, from the Buddhist perspective, having labels and concepts such as "He is a Muslim, I am Buddhist, you are Christian" is good?

There is nothing wrong with labels themselves. We need them to function in our conventional world. For example, we need labels to differentiate a baby from an adult. Problems arise, however, when we become attached to a label, or when we confuse the person with the label. When we lump people together as a group, superimpose our judgment and narrow labels on them,

and then think this is who they are, it creates problems. Labelling “Buddhist”, “Christian” and “Muslim” is fair enough because people worship and practise in different ways. But the moment we say, “I am this and you are that, therefore I can’t trust you”, or “therefore I am better”, or “therefore you should become what I am”, we get into problems.

Sometimes people think, “I am this and you are that, therefore we are different. Don’t try to impose your ways on me. If you do, I’ll try to impose my ways on you too”. That way of thinking is totally fruitless. It doesn’t bring peace and understanding. Such divisive attitudes may occur among groups in society or even among people at a family dinner. If we look within ourselves, why do we try to impose our views on somebody else? It’s because we don’t have self-confidence. When we don’t believe in ourselves, we try to convince other people how good or how right we are, because we think that if we can convince them we are good or right and they see us that way, then we must be good and right.

When people lack self-confidence, they often become arrogant in an attempt to feel good about themselves. Arrogance and low self-esteem are related. When we don’t believe in ourselves, we create an image of being knowledgeable and powerful in the hope that other people (and we too) will believe we are. On the other hand, when we believe in ourselves and feel comfortable with ourselves, we don’t need to create such a false

image or push our views on others. We don't need to prove to others that we are competent, talented, intelligent, artistic and so forth because we know we are. When we are confident, we can also be humble, listen to others and respect them. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is a good example of this.

Let's not judge terrorists, thinking, "They have such low self-esteem so they do this. But I have self-confidence and therefore would never act so deplorably." That, too, is arrogance on our part. Instead, let's look into the areas in which we lack confidence and are puffed up. Let's observe when we push our views and ways of doing things on others. In other words, whatever fault we observe in others, we should look for it in ourselves as well and apply Dharma methods to change it. As individuals, groups and countries, we need to do this kind of reflection and transformation in ourselves.



Another world event that people are concerned with is global warming. What do you think of this? As Buddhists, what is our role in protecting the environment?

Global warming is an important issue for everyone on the planet. If you have not watched or read *An Inconvenient Truth*, I highly recommend you do so.

We must protect our environment that we sentient beings live in. Some people are concerned that this is impractical economically, but I do not believe this to be the case. First, without protecting the environment, there will be no future for human life on this planet and thus no economy to worry about. Second, researching and developing new and renewable energy sources will surely be financially profitable as these are major needs today.

The Buddha taught interdependence and compassion. Both of these principles apply to global warming and environmental pollution. Our health and the health and lives of other species depend on what we consume and how we dispose waste products. Compassion for sentient beings entails protecting the place they live since our happiness and well-being are intricately tied to the environment around us. Thus, as Buddhists, we should be very active in protecting the environment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Reducing consumption and recycling are essential, and the Buddhist community needs to be more active in this regard. Instead of using Styrofoam containers, we should use paper. Better yet, use containers that can be washed or recycled. Instead of casually tossing water bottles into the garbage, we should recycle them. Newspapers, magazines and general paper should be recycled in every business and home. Recycling may take a little more effort on our part, but the benefit will be dramatic, as will the harm if we neglect this.

I believe those of us in modern societies have become complacent. We are so used to throwing things out that we don't think about where they come from and where they go when we dispose them. We have also become used to being able to get in the car and go wherever we wish, again without considering where the fuel for the cars comes from and where the petrol emissions go. But when we ignore such things, we are leaving our mess for future generations to clean up. Is that showing compassion for our children and grandchildren?

Those of us in modern countries have become too accustomed to thinking only of our own convenience at any particular place and moment in time. We need to enlarge our perspective to include the dependent nature of everything involved in our existence. If we have some awareness of this, we will act more responsibly, realising that our getting in the car and driving when we could take the bus or train influences whether or not polar bears in the Arctic will be able to survive. Water pollution caused by factories and pesticides affects whether we will have enough healthy drinking water in the future. It also affects the existence of fish and other sea life. To protect all life forms on the planet and the environments they live in, we should happily reduce consumption and relinquish conveniences when necessary. Doing so might have beneficial effects on our social and family relationships as well.

DHARMA AND TERMINAL ILLNESS

What are ways to deal with sickness?

First, we have to understand that sickness is unavoidable. We all get sick. Once we are born into cyclic existence with a body that is under the influence of mental afflictions and karma, sickness is guaranteed. That is the nature of our body — it ages and falls ill. Ultimately, it stops functioning all together. It dies and the ever-changing mindstream goes on to another rebirth.

What are the ways to deal with sickness when it comes? Our usual reactions to illness are to feel sorry

for ourselves, blame somebody else and be angry. These responses make ourselves and those around us miserable. Do they cure the illness? No, of course not.

The Buddha encouraged us to look at sickness from a wider perspective; that is, although we should seek appropriate medicine to cure the illness, we should also investigate the root causes of sickness. Sickness happens after birth in *samsara* (cyclic existence). Once we are born, we will fall sick, unless death comes first. What are the causes of rebirth in cyclic existence? Mental afflictions (principally clinging attachment, anger and ignorance) and karma (our physical, verbal and mental actions). These boil down to one principal cause: self-grasping ignorance, the ignorance that misapprehends the nature of reality. Thus, freeing ourselves from this ignorance is essential.

Most of us agree, “Yes, yes, I must eliminate ignorance. But, I’ll do it later. I’m having a good time right now. I’m young and my life is in front of me. I can do so many things. There are so many people I want to be with, new experiences I want to have, and people I care about. I want to have a career. I want to travel. I want to have new sense pleasures. I want to be creative, artistic, athletic. I want to do this and that. I’ll worry about cyclic existence later on.”

For eons, we have been procrastinating in confronting the principal cause of our misery. Where have the procrastination and excuses gotten us? We keep taking

one rebirth after another because of them. Why do we procrastinate? Because of craving.

Our suffering traces back to ignorance and craving. To eliminate them, we first have to see the situation of cyclic existence clearly. This involves developing great courage to examine our situation, its origins, the alternative to it (liberation), and the path to liberation. We have to learn about and put some effort into realising the ultimate nature of reality, the emptiness of inherent existence of all persons and phenomena. Only then, can we eliminate the ignorance which causes birth, ageing, sickness and death.

I will discuss other conventional ways to work with sickness, but to be faithful to the Buddha's teachings, I wanted to put this topic in the correct perspective first. Skipping over the explanation of cyclic existence in order to give you helpful hints for immediate problems would be cheating you. Rebirth in cyclic existence is the actual problem and directly realising the ultimate nature of reality is the solution to it. However, until we get to the point when we non-conceptually realise the emptiness of inherent existence, here are some other ways to deal with sickness:

1. Press the 'pause' button on fear.

Observe the mind and see what our reaction to sickness is. I don't know if it is the same for you, but when I'm sick, my mind becomes very afraid and jumps to "worst case scenario" conclusions. For example, I

have a funny feeling in my chest and think I'm going to have a heart attack. "What if the heart attack happens while I'm in my cabin? Will someone find me soon enough? Will they be able to get me to the hospital quickly? In the States, we don't have low-cost health care, so how will the medical costs get covered?" It was just a small sensation, but my mind blows it up thinking, "I'm going to have a life-threatening heart attack!" Another scene: our stomach is upset and we think, "This must be stomach cancer." When our knees hurt in meditation position, we think, "I'd better move immediately. Otherwise I will be crippled my entire life." Does your mind go wild and write these kinds of horror stories?

Initially, there is simply a sensation of discomfort in the body — a physical sensation. Depending on how we relate to that physical sensation, we may create a lot of mental suffering. When we react to that physical sensation with fear and conjure up horror stories in our minds, we create great mental suffering.

If we are able to press the 'Pause' button on our fear, and just be aware of the physical sensations, we won't create so much mental suffering. It is just a sensation to experience. It doesn't have to be something that scares us. We don't have to be tense. It is just a sensation, and we let that sensation be.

In our meditation, we experience different physical sensations. If we label a sensation "pain in the knee", then everything really starts to hurt. However, if

we label it “sensation” and we don’t have a strong concept or mental picture of our knee, then it is just a sensation. Investigate: Where is the sensation? Where is the body?

Experiment with different ways of playing with the physical experience of pain in your meditation, instead of falling back into the habit of tensing around it and being afraid of it.

2. *What makes this sensation “mine”?*

Ever wondered what makes us tense and fearful when we experience a particular sensation? If we examine, it’s because we label it mine, “This pain is mine. My back hurts.” As soon as the label “mine” is given, a strong sense of “I” arises and the sensation becomes a big deal. It’s interesting in our meditation to playfully ask ourselves, “What makes this sensation mine? What is me or mine about this sensation?” As the mind investigates this more deeply, we call into question the strong notion of solid “I”. Does such an “I” and “mine” exist in the way it appears to? This leads us to meditate on the absence of independent or inherent existence.

3. *Think, “Oh good! It’s great that I’m sick!”*

Another way to respond when we are sick is to think, “It’s great that I’m sick!” This is diametrically opposed to how we usually think, isn’t it? The Dharma antidotes for most of our afflictions are the exact opposite of what our mind automatically thinks. The Buddha prescribed

doing the opposite of what our self-centred mind wants to do. In this case, it means when we are sick, we say, “Great! I’m so glad to be sick!”

You may think, “Are you crazy? What do you mean by ‘It’s great to be sick?’” Look at it this way: our illness is caused by negative karma that we have created in the past. Now that the negative karma is ripening in the form of our sickness, it is not obscuring our mind anymore. Maybe that negative karma had the force to cause us to be reborn in a horrible rebirth (such as a hell being, hungry ghost or animal) for a long time, but instead it is now ripening as a comparatively small pain. If we look at it this way, the illness we have right now is actually quite manageable. It is not something to freak out about. It is not that bad; compared to an unfortunate birth that lasts for eons, this is a breeze! In fact, if it were this easy to purify such dreadful negative karma, we wouldn’t mind even being a little sicker!

While a nun who was a friend of mine was on a retreat, a big boil surged up on her cheek. It was very painful. She was taking a walk during a break between meditation sessions when she met our teacher, Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Rinpoche asked, “How are you?” She groaned, “I have this boil...” Rinpoche replied, “Great! Fantastic! You’re so fortunate!” This was of course the last thing she wanted to hear. She wanted some pity. But Rinpoche said, “This is wonderful! You’re experiencing the result of so much negative karma that

could have ripened in a horrible state just by having a boil. How fortunate you are!”

If we look at it this way, we realise that our present illness or pain is actually not so bad. We can bear it when we think that it could have ripened in a more painful way. In addition, we feel fortunate that this karma is ripening now, so then it won't obscure our mind anymore. Without it clogging up our mind, generating realisation of the path to enlightenment will be easier. This is another tool to use when you are sick.

4. *Just be kind.*

Several years ago, another friend who was in her early thirties went to see a doctor because she wasn't feeling well. He diagnosed her as having a terrible disease and told her she would be sick for a long time and would probably die.

My friend's instantaneous reaction was, of course, to be upset and frightened. She began to slip into self-pity, depression and anger. Then at some point, she just stopped and asked herself, “If the Dalai Lama were in my shoes, how would he feel? How would he handle this situation?” Thinking about it, she reckoned that His Holiness would conclude, “Just be kind.”

So she adopted “Just be kind” as her motto. She thought, “I'm going to be in the hospital for a while and will meet all sorts of people there — nurses, technicians, therapists, doctors, janitors, other patients,

my family and others. I'm going to be kind to all of them." She made up her mind to be kind to everyone she was going to encounter during her journey in the hospital and hospice.

Once her mind decided to be kind, it became peaceful. She had accepted that she was sick, and she had a mode of action, which was to just be kind. She realised that even while she was sick, her life could still be beneficial. She could share kindness with others that would improve the quality of their lives. She could be a cheerful, cooperative and appreciative patient who brought happiness to the hospital staff and the other patients.

As it turned out, after her doctor did more tests, he told her that the first diagnosis was wrong: she did not have such a bad disease. Of course, she was quite relieved to hear that, but she said that working with her mind about being ill had been a very good experience for her. Now that her prognosis wasn't so bad, it would be even easier to be kind to others.

5. Lead a worthwhile life using your mind

While I lived in Singapore in 1987 and 1988, I met a very nice young man who was dying from cancer. He was in his late twenties and before falling ill, had a very optimistic life. He had just been accepted to an American university for graduate studies and was excited about going, but after he got sick, all those plans stopped midstream. One day I visited him and

he woefully said, "I'm just a useless person. I can't even leave my flat." We were near the window, and I said, "Look out the window. There are so many people driving around, walking to and from the train station, busily going here and there. Do you think their lives are worthwhile? They might be busy running around with a full schedule, but does that mean their lives are worthwhile?"

I went on to explain that living a worthwhile life does not mean being the busiest of the busy. Living a worthwhile life depends upon what we do with our mind. Even if our body is incapacitated, if we use our heart and our mind to practise the Dharma, our life becomes very beneficial. We don't need to be healthy to practise the Dharma.

It might be easier to practise if we are healthy, but still, if we are sick, we can use whatever time and energy we have to practise. Even if we cannot sit up straight and are lying on a bed, even if we have to sleep many hours, even if we are weak or cannot see well, we can still think kind thoughts and contemplate the nature of reality. We can think about karma and take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. There is so much Dharma practice that we can do even when we are sick. When we take advantage of this situation to practise the Buddha's teachings, we make our life very meaningful.

Don't think your life is meaningful just because you are running around making widgets. Don't think

that having money, a full schedule, many possessions and many friends are qualities of a meaningful life. Sometimes, externally our lives may look wonderful and we may have many awards and possessions to show for our efforts, but in the process of procuring these, we may have created negative karma. That negative karma is not a useful product of our activities. For instance, when we have a lot of greed or self-centred ambition to be famous, we may lie, deceive and cheat others. We may talk behind others' backs, ruin their reputation, break up friendships and gossip to get what we want. Although we may fulfil our desires, all these external signs of success will fade and when we die, only our karma will follow us.

On the other hand, we could be sick and lying in bed, but if we use our mind to create constructive positive karma, we are creating the cause for a good rebirth. If we meditate on love and compassion and do the *taking and giving* meditation while we are lying in bed, our mind will become closer to liberation and enlightenment. This makes our life highly meaningful in the long run.

Don't underestimate the power of the mind. The mind is very powerful. Even if we are sick, just the power of the positive thoughts we generate can influence the people around us quite a bit. Kind and wise thoughts and feelings also bring about good rebirths and propel us on the path to enlightenment.

Since I learned of my mother's illness, I haven't been able to sit and meditate. I feel sad and paralysed because what I am able to offer to ease her misery seems to be so little. I thought of saying prayers for her, but I don't know how to or what to pray for. Could you please advise me?

It's wonderful that you are seeking ways to apply the Dharma to your present situation. You want to help your mother and to do that most effectively, you have to overcome your own sadness and paralysis. You can achieve that by contemplating the disadvantages of *samsara* — the six sufferings, the three types of *dukkha* (unsatisfactory circumstances), the eight difficulties of human beings and so forth. Doing these meditations will help you understand that what transpires, although not pleasant, is standard fare for us sentient beings trapped in *samsara*. As long as we are caught in cyclic existence, being reborn repeatedly under the influence of mental afflictions and tainted karma, lasting happiness is not possible. Real freedom from illness and distress is possible only when we have liberated ourselves from cyclic existence through realising the ultimate nature of phenomena. Understanding this will energise one to strive for liberation and diminish the tendency to think one can make *samsara* fun and suffering-free.

In addition, observe the thoughts and emotions you are having. You may want to jot some of them down. Don't judge them; just acknowledge them. Observe

what is happening inside you, accept the feelings, but don't indulge in them or get caught up in the stories behind them. The mind likes to conjure many stories about how things *should* be. But how we think things should be and how they are differ. As much as we can accept the reality of what is at the present moment, that much we stop fighting reality. Sometimes reality is not so pleasant, but when we fight it, we create additional suffering for ourselves. Crying, "My mother shouldn't be ill" does not make her well. When you accept her illness, you will be more at peace within and thus better able to respond to her needs.

Then examine which of your thoughts and feelings are supported by negative states — ignorance, attachment, anger — and which are by positive states — loving-kindness, compassion, patience, generosity and wisdom. Differentiate which thoughts are realistic and which are seeking something that cannot come to be. Then ask yourself, "What other ways can I look at these situations?" In this regard, it can be helpful to think, "How would Chenrezig (Guanyin), the Buddha of Compassion, look at this situation? If Chenrezig were in my shoes, how would he view the situation? What thoughts and feelings would he have and how would he deal with the situation?" Thinking like this is very helpful for pulling us out of the narrow viewpoint of discouragement and depression.

Doing the Chenrezig practice would also be helpful. Visualise Chenrezig (Guanyin) in the space in front of

you, with a body made of radiant light. While reciting the mantra *om mani padme hum*, imagine beautiful light radiates from Chenrezig and it fills your body, freeing you from sadness and grief and pacifying your mind. It fills your mother's body, healing her illness and purifying the karma that caused the illness. The light also fills all sentient beings, purifying their afflictions and karma and filling them with love and compassion. The light also inspires you, your mother and all sentient beings so that you can actualise realisations of the path. At the end, concentrate on all beings being filled with Chenrezig's light of wisdom and compassion and abiding in peace.

Doing the *tonglen* (taking and giving) meditation is also beneficial. In it, take suffering and its causes — afflictions and karma — from your mother. You can also take suffering and its causes from your future self. The latter will help you accept whatever you are feeling and free you from judging yourself. Then broaden the scope of the meditation so that with compassion, you take the suffering of all sentient beings and use it to destroy the self-centredness that plagues you, and with love imagine transforming, multiplying and giving your body, possessions and merit to sentient beings, bringing them happiness and the realisations of the path. Read *Transforming Adversity into Joy and Courage* by Geshe Jampa Tegchok for an excellent and in-depth description of how to do the taking and giving meditation.

This is a wonderful time for you to connect with

your mother in a meaningful way. Just love her and show her your love. That in itself will help ease her suffering. Of course, you do whatever you can to ease her physical misery, but don't expect to be able to cease it altogether. Not even the Buddha can do that! Rather give her comfort. Give her space so that she can discuss topics that are of concern to her. Just being able to discuss her worries with someone who can listen to her from his or her heart will help her.

Of course, that means you have to be comfortable talking about these topics too. Sometimes, bringing up death, financial difficulties, past discord in the family and so on makes us anxious. For that reason, we usually change the topic quickly if a sick or dying person brings it up or brush off his or her concern by saying, "Don't talk like that" or "Don't worry." However, some of these topics are of great importance to that person and our emotional discomfort and inability to listen close the avenue to that person being able to work out key issues. Therefore, as much as we can, we should use Dharma practice to contemplate these issues ourselves, so that we will be at ease in discussing them with others. Of course, that doesn't mean we should push an ill person to discuss a topic he or she is not yet ready to discuss; it means we are open and relaxed to talk about it should he or her bring it up.

Dedicating our Dharma practice to the ill person, and making prayers for his or her well-being can aid us and others. I recommend reciting *The King of*

Prayers, which is also called *The Extraordinary Aspiration of the Practice of Samantabhadra*. A beautiful prayer about bodhisattva practice, it has us envisioning Buddha lands on each atom, thus stretching our mind beyond its usual ordinary conceptions and inspiring it.

Reading and contemplating the *Four Immeasurables* — equanimity, love, compassion and joy — are also helpful. You can read these to your mother as well and ask her to contemplate them together with you.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were to abide in equanimity, free of bias, attachment and anger. May they abide in this way. I shall cause them to abide in this way. Lord Buddha, please inspire me to be able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings had happiness and its causes. May they have these. I shall cause them to have these. Lord Buddha, please inspire me to be able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from suffering and its causes. May they be free. I shall cause them to be free. Lord Buddha, please inspire me to be able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were never parted from upper rebirth and liberation's excellent bliss. May they never be parted. I shall cause them never to be parted. Lord Buddha, please inspire me to be able to do so.

You can also express your deepest aspirations and wishes for your mother and all sentient beings in your own words. For example, you may aspire,

May my mother fully recover from her illness, meet the Buddha's teachings, practise them well, and quickly become a fully enlightened Buddha.

If she is unable to recover fully, may she accept her limitations and still make her life meaningful by thinking compassionate thoughts.

If she dies, may her mind be relaxed and loving; may her body be free from pain.

In her future rebirths may she encounter the Dharma and have all conducive circumstances to practise it.

May she transform her mind into wisdom and compassion and become a Buddha for the benefit of all.

In all future lives in whatever forms we meet, may we only help each other to create constructive karma and aid each other along the path to enlightenment.



What happens if there is a sudden death or somebody is in a coma before he or she dies?

In a sudden death, I think there is still a brief opportunity for a flash of virtuous thoughts to arise. The more we train ourselves to have virtuous states of mind

in our daily life, the more likely it is for them to arise just before death, due to the force of familiarity.

In the case of a coma, I am not convinced that people are oblivious to their environment. I have talked to people who were comatose and they remember being conscious in coma. Although their minds were not as clear as in ordinary waking state, they said they could hear and understand what the people in the room were saying. However, they could not communicate outwardly with everybody else. One friend said she was aware and wanted to talk but could not. Meanwhile, those standing around her were saying, "She's still in a coma."

I believe it is effective to meditate and recite prayers sitting near a person in coma. Hearing words that express good values and altruistic aspirations soothes that person's mind, even if he or she cannot speak or let us know that he or she is hearing them. We should also be careful of what we say near a comatose person so as not to upset him or her unintentionally. Our words can influence people who are dying or in a coma, so let's take care to speak in a beneficial way. If we are comatose and have some awareness, then as much as possible we should try to take refuge in the Three Jewels and steer our mind in a virtuous direction.



How should one prepare for a loved one's death?

In the weeks or months before the person dies:

- Express your positive feelings for your loved one. Tell the person you love him or her (write a letter if you can't speak with the person directly). Don't wait until he or she is no longer around to discover and express your affection and love.
- Encourage the person to share his or her love and kindness with others. Help your loved one remember all of the love and kindness that he or she has given and received from others during his or her lifetime.
- Encourage the person to remember the beneficial things he or she did in his or her life.
- If the person express regrets, listen with acceptance and kindness.
- Clear up your relationship with the dying loved one. If you need to forgive the person or apologise to him or her, do that. If the person apologise to you, accept when he or she makes amends.
- Encourage the person to forgive whomever he or she needs to forgive and to apologise to whomever he or she needs to apologise to.
- Encourage the person to give away his or her possessions in a spirit of generosity. In that way, the person will accumulate great merit which he or she should dedicate to have a good rebirth and to attain liberation and enlightenment.

- Encourage family members to do kind things to help the dying family member.
- Discuss about end-of-life issues — “living will”, the amount of medication to ease pain, religious services, burial or cremation, donations to make in their name, distribution of possessions, and so forth — if and when the person is willing to do so.
- Let go of your own agenda, of what you want the dying person to talk about or how you want the person to die. Listen to him or her with your heart. Talk about what he or she wants to talk about, not what you think he or she should think about.
- Let your dying loved one tell you how much (if any) pain medication he or she needs. Since the person is terminal, there is no need to worry about addiction. On the other hand, avoid sedating the person more than is needed. Try to keep his or her mind as clear as possible without the person being in excessive pain.
- Get in touch with your own issues about death, and use your Dharma practice to help you work with the dying person.

At the time of death:

- Make the room as quiet and peaceful as possible.
- Be peaceful and calm. Avoid crying in the room.

Ask all those who are upset to step outside the room so that the room can remain peaceful for the sake of the person who is dying.

- Mentally give your dying loved one a heartfelt hug and let the person know of your love for him or her, but do not cling or encourage the person to cling.
- If it seems necessary, remind the person that his or her children and other family members will be all right after he or she passes away.
- If the person is of another faith, talk to him or her in the language of that faith — use words, symbols and concepts with which the person is familiar. Encourage the person to have faith and to generate a kind heart towards others. If he or she is not religious, talk about compassion or loving-kindness. That will help his or her mind to be calm and peaceful.
- Recite mantras or say prayers for the person, quietly or aloud, depending on what is appropriate, as he or she is dying.
- Don't do anything to bring up distress; for example, don't speak of old hurts.
- Often the person who is about to die will wait until family members have left the room and he or she is either alone or with someone who is not family before passing away. Don't feel that you did something wrong or have abandoned the person if he or she dies while you are not there.

- Remember: you can't prevent anyone from dying.
- Trust the person in his or her process and be supportive.
- Tell surrounding family members that we are fond of the dying person and that we love him or her. Say thank you to the person.

After death:

- If it is possible, allow the body to be untouched for three days after breathing has stopped in order to give time for the consciousness to leave the body. This usually needs to be pre-arranged with the hospital or family. Do not touch the body during this time. If the body starts to smell or if you see fluid oozing from the nostrils, it indicates that the consciousness has left and the body may be moved even before three days have transpired. If it is not possible to leave the body untouched for that long (it often isn't), then leave it untouched for as long as possible.
- After the person has died, touch his or her crown (top of the head) when you first touch the body, and say, "Go to pureland" or "Take a precious human rebirth". Or, according to the person's faith, say, "Go to heaven" or "Go to a safe place".
- Dedicate merit for the person to have a precious human rebirth: "May you have all

conducive circumstances to practise the path to enlightenment.” Pray that the deceased’s transition to the next life is free from fear or anxiety. Express in words or in your thoughts all the good wishes you have for the deceased.

After a dear one dies, it is very beneficial for people who are close to him or her to do prayers and meditations on that person’s behalf. These are described below. It is also helpful to offer his or her possessions to charities. In that way, their possessions will be used by people who need them, such as the poor, needy and ill. We can then rejoice that other people benefit from having use of those things and dedicate the merit from generosity, for our loved one’s good rebirth, liberation and enlightenment. This is an excellent way to benefit the ones we love. People also make monetary offerings to temples, monasteries, spiritual masters and Dharma centres on behalf of a loved one. Since holy beings are considered a “field of merit” due to their virtue, great merit is created from offering to them. You may also request the monasteries or Dharma centres to do meditations and prayers for the deceased person.

Here’s a condensed meditation and prayer you can do after a dear one dies:

Visualise Chenrezig (Guanyin) above your head. Visualise your dear one in front of you, with another Chenrezig on the person’s head. As you recite the mantra, visualise much light and nectar from Chenrezig flowing into him or her, completely purifying all obscurations,

negativities, distress, afflictions, disturbing emotions, fear etc, and bringing all enlightened qualities — love, compassion, generosity, wisdom etc. Then imagine Chenrezig melting into light and that the light goes into the person's heart centre (at the middle of their chest). Think that their mind and Chenrezig's mind of wisdom and compassion become non-dual.

Conclude the meditation by dedicating for the happiness and enlightenment of all sentient beings and especially praying for the deceased. You may recite verses written by the great masters or you may express your wonderful good wishes in your own words as you send the person onto his or her next life with love. You may aspire and pray:

May _____ have a precious human life. May he or she be born in a place with abundant food, clothing, medicine and shelter. May he or she have good friends, meet fully qualified Mahayana spiritual teachers who will stimulate his or her good qualities and guide him or her along the path to enlightenment. May his or her kind heart, talents and skills manifest readily in his or her next life and may he or she use them to benefit all beings. May he or she gain the realisation of equanimity, love, compassion and joy. May he or she realise the ultimate nature of reality. May all his or her future lives, wherever he or she is born, be useful and beneficial for all sentient beings.

May he or she have all conducive circumstances for practice, generate the three principal aspects of

the path (the determination to be free, the altruistic intention and correct view of the emptiness of inherent existence), and quickly become a Buddha. Through my Dharma practice, may I benefit this person, leading him or her on the path to enlightenment. By my practice becoming stronger and purer, may I be able to teach this person the Dharma in future lives.

If you wish, recite *The Extraordinary Aspiration of the Practice of Samantabhadra* for the person. You could also do the Medicine Buddha practice. Since family and friends have a strong connection with the person, their doing meditation and dedications for the person is important. If you can do these on the 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th, 35th, 42nd and 49th days after the person's death, it is especially good. (*Note: the day the person dies counts as Day 1, so if she dies on a Monday, the 7th, 14th, and so on days will be on Sundays.*)



I have heard about the practice of *phowa*, the transference of consciousness at the time of death. Is it helpful to do this practice for the deceased person?

For a person to do *phowa* at the time of his or her death, the person must have practised it while he or she was alive. It is extremely important for someone who practises *phowa* to do a long life practice such as

Amitayus as well. Then, if well trained, the person will know the right time in the death process to transfer his or her consciousness.

If someone has a close karmic or Dharma relationship with the deceased person and has mastered the *phowa* practice, he or she may be able to transfer the other person's mind to pureland at the time of death. However, if the former is not well trained in *phowa* or does not have a close relationship, there is little benefit in doing the *phowa* practice. Many people like to think they can do *phowa* and transfer another person's mind to the pureland at death. However, since most are unable to keep their own mind free from afflictions and non-virtuous thoughts while they are alive and healthy, thinking that they can control another person's mind at the delicate time of death is inappropriate.

The Seven Point Thought Training speaks of transference of consciousness in a different way, mentioning the practice of the five forces while alive and the five forces at the time of death. I have found this teaching a very inspiring practice for generating *bodhicitta* and the wisdom realising emptiness in our lives and applying both of these at the time of death. I encourage you to study this book.



How can we deal with grief when our loved ones die?

First, we have to understand the grieving process. Grieving is the process of adapting to a change we either didn't expect or didn't want to happen. Transience and impermanence are the nature of things, but due to ingrained ignorance, we reject this truth. Change comes as a surprise to the mind that mistakenly grasps at permanence. Thus grieving helps us to adjust to a change we didn't want or didn't anticipate. Grieving, when done in a healthy way, enables us to accept change.

All of us know intellectually that we and the people we love are going to die. However, in our hearts, we don't really believe it. Some corner of our mind thinks that somehow it is going to be different, that we will be able to control the world so that the changes we don't want won't happen. Deep down, we believe that things will continue the way they are, even though we intellectually know that they will change. Grieving helps us to bring our intellectual understanding of impermanence into our heart so that we can accept the natural process of change.

The Buddha encouraged us to meditate on the transient nature of people and phenomena. When we do, we let go of expecting things to be the way we want. We come to see change as a possibility and an opportunity for growth, instead of viewing it as a loss and an enemy to avoid. Whether change brings us joy or

misery does not depend so much on what the external event is, but on our attitude about it.

Sometimes, the pain we experience when change occurs — especially the change that death entails — is due to the conditioning we receive from adults when we were young. For example, our parents or other relatives may have felt uncomfortable discussing unwanted changes such as death. They may have treated it as a taboo subject. Or we may have seen adults around us sobbing or withdrawing into depression when a death occurred in the family. In some cultures, if you don't wail, it means you didn't really love the deceased person. In understanding our own reactions to death, it may be helpful to recognise the events we witnessed and the conditioning we received in this area when we were young. Thankfully, now as adults we can understand these experiences better so that they don't keep us bound in misery.

When a loved one passes away, a variety of emotions can come into our minds in quick succession. First, there is shock and disbelief, especially if the deceased is a young person. This comes due to our misconception that impermanent things are permanent. The body is still there, but the person is no longer there. The mind — the part of a person that feels, emotes, cognises and experiences — is missing.

Then a sense of loss and sadness pervades when our minds jump into the future and have thoughts such as, "My dear one is no longer here. I miss him or her. My

future will be dreadful without this person in my life.” Is this thought true? How do we know the future is going to be bad? Of course, we may miss the deceased person, but our lives involve more than one person. Our forecast of a dismal future is neither realistic nor accurate. Actually, our sadness is because we had a conception of the future, and now it is evident that what we envision of will not occur. In other words, we mourn a future that will never happen. Of course, that future hasn’t happen yet, so we are not actually losing anything we had. We are just giving up an incorrect preconception of how the future would be like.

Third, confusion steps in. Our minds start spinning, “Why did this happen? Why did the person have to die?” We think that if we know why our dear one died, we could have prevented it. Is that true? From the moment we were born, we are heading towards death. This isn’t morbid, it is just the fact of life that everyone who is born must die. Why did they die? Because they were born in cyclic existence under the influence of afflictions and karma. Even if we knew the disease or injury that was the direct cause of the person’s death, we couldn’t bring the person back to life.

Death is a natural outcome and a part of life. For ordinary beings, death marks a transition into a future life in the cycle of death and rebirth. Once we have taken a rebirth, death is the natural and inevitable outcome. Life and death are inextricably bound up. We are usually busy in seeking pleasures and running

around trying to be successful. But, when somebody dies, we may start to question ourselves about the meaning of life and what happens after death.

The confusion may progress to become anger and forceful rejection of what happened, "It isn't fair that he died. He was too young to die. Who allowed this to occur?" Can anger or blaming others change the situation and undo it? No, it cannot.

Guilt is another emotion some people feel after the death of a dear one. For example, if we quarrelled with that person in our most recent encounter, we may feel guilty or remorseful for having made cruel comments. In this case, doing a purification practice and generating love and compassion for all sentient beings is a good method to alleviate the guilt. Then, we should bear this incident in mind and avoid uttering harsh words in the future. We don't know when the other person or ourselves will die, and we don't want to feel guilty for making what could be our last encounter a hurtful one.

Self-forgiveness is important if previously we had acted in hurtful ways towards the deceased. We acknowledge that we have made a mistake, and understanding that we were suffering and confused at that time, we forgive ourselves. We should also reflect on how we got involved in that harmful behaviour and its disadvantages. In that way, we will learn from our mistakes and move forward in life with wisdom and mindfulness, rather than tormenting ourselves with

guilt. We cannot undo that situation; we can only learn from it. Guilt and self-blame are useless and non-productive emotions.

Sometimes, people blame themselves for another person's death, even when they do not have any direct responsibility for it. Parents may think — even when their children are adults — that they should have been able to prevent the child's death. Friends may be overcome with self-doubt, "What if I had done xyz? Then my friend would not have died." Blaming ourselves for another person's death is unrealistic. From the Buddhist perspective, things happen because the causes for them exist. We don't have control over all the causes. We are one small part in this mass of interdependent factors that come together to produce an event. We can't control everything. No one can, not even the Buddha.

After someone dies, we are likely to experience a variety of emotions. It is good to recognise that this will happen and accept it. At the same time, we can observe our emotions and assess them. Are they realistic and reasonable? What preconceptions lie behind them? Everyone will have a different grieving process. We need to accept that difference and grieve in a way that is suitable for us as well as give space to others to grieve in a different way.

Several years ago, I was asked to preside at a memorial service for a man in his thirties who had died of cancer. When his wife spoke at the service, she was radiant. She said, "John, I'm going to take all that

love you gave me, all the love we shared together, into my heart. And then, because it's not something that can ever diminish, I'm going to spread it out from my heart to everyone I encounter." I was very moved by her words, and I am sure her husband would have been as well.

Grief after the death of a loved one is not about missing them in the present as much as realising that our image of the future — a future which had included them — needs to be changed. In other words, we are not mourning the past, we are mourning the future. But the future never was, was it? It was only our conception, so why cling onto something that was never there? Instead, let's rejoice that we knew this person for as long as we did. How wonderful that we were able to share and to learn from each other for as long as we did. Everything is transient; and we were so fortunate to have them in our lives and to love them and be loved by them for as long as we did.

What an incredible way to heal from the death of a loved one — to rejoice at the time we had together instead of mourning for a future that never was and will never be. How wonderful it is to share the love we have for one person by opening our hearts to others and giving that love to them. This enables us to have love and compassion for our loved one, wherever the continuity of his or her mindstream was reborn. We send our dear one off with love, wishing him or her the best, knowing that the person has the potential for

enlightenment, and praying that he or she will make use of his or her internal goodness in the future. We, too, have this potential for enlightenment, so let's access it within our own heart and mind and having done so, live peacefully within ourselves and make a positive contribution to the well-being of others.

We can use loss of any kind — of a person, of our home or job — to fuel our determination to be free of this cycle of rebirth caused by ignorance, attachment, anger and karma. We use our own suffering to recognise that suffering from loss is common to all living beings, and in this way increase our compassion for others. Then with the wish to free all sentient beings from all suffering in cyclic existence, we generate *bodhicitta*, the aspiration to attain full enlightenment for their benefit.

Giving away the belongings of our deceased dear ones to the poor and needy, or making monetary offerings to temples, monasteries, spiritual masters and Dharma centres on their behalf, and then dedicating the merit from generosity for the deceased's good rebirth, liberation and enlightenment is an excellent way to benefit the ones we love. It also has the by-product of producing happiness and peace in our own mind. This process of doing something on behalf of the deceased — through making donations, doing spiritual practices and dedicating — helps us heal from our loss because we are engaged with helping the ones we love and others as well.

There is no fixed time schedule for the length of the grieving process or the stages we go through when grieving. Each of us requires a different length of time; each person grieves in his or her own way. Sometimes, the smallest thing can unexpectedly trigger memories of those who have died. This happens and is to be expected. There is no cause for alarm. Whenever the grief arises, accept it. Call forth your own love and compassion for your loved one, for yourself and for all beings. Reaffirm your determination to live honestly, kindly and generously. Use the remembrance of that person to inspire you to live in a vibrant way with kindness towards yourself and other beings. If you were previously too busy to nourish your spiritual aspirations, allow yourself to do that now. Getting in touch with our ethical values and spiritual aspirations can transform our lives. This is a tribute to our dear ones who had passed away.

I would like to relate to you a story that illustrates how death can bring people together in remarkable ways and inspire others in their spiritual practice.

I was in Bodhgaya, India, in 1998, having been invited to be a member of the bhikshuni sangha giving full ordination. Venerable Chopel Dronma from Spain had come with ten of her sister nuns from Samye Ling Buddhist Centre in Scotland to attend the ordination. She was in her forties; she had a heart condition, although very few people knew about it. One morning during the ordination programme, she suddenly

collapsed under the bodhi tree. Although people tried to revive her, she was dead within half an hour's time. Fortunately, her teacher Lama Yeshe from Samye Ling was by her side doing prayers.

Two days later, hundreds of people gathered for the funeral. People who had never met Venerable Chopel but had heard about her unusual death came to offer flowers, incense, katas and candles. Her body was in a simple box; we sprinkled flowers over it and placed it in the back of a jeep that carried it to a vast sandy area across the dried up Neranjara River. We, nuns, lifted her body out of the box and placed it on the funeral pyre. By that time, hundreds of people were there — Indians, Europeans, Tibetans, Chinese, Sri Lankas and others — seated on mats surrounding the pyre. The chanting resumed and the fire was lit. The Chinese monks and nuns, in flowing yellow robes, chanted in Chinese, then the Theravada monks in ocre, saffron and brown robes, chanted in Pali. All the while, the maroon-robed Tibetan monastics sat and chanted in Tibetan. I was in awe; how incredible to have so many monastics from various traditions participate in the funeral of a foreigner they didn't even know! I had a strong sense of the unity and deep harmony of the sangha as everyone spontaneously joined in to help.

As we walked away from the pyre, her sister said to me, "This is like a dream. In the West, funerals are so awful. You have to deal with so many parties to arrange it, in addition to their difficult emotional reactions.

But over here, it was effortless and so many people helped.” Venerable Dronma’s death and her funeral made all who were present uplifted and inspired. No one was sobbing with grief. No one argued over her funeral arrangements. No one felt drowned in misery. Instead everyone was inspired — by the Dharma and by this nun’s unassuming practice. She must have made strong prayers not only for her life to be meaningful, but also for her death to be beneficial for others. Almost everyone at her funeral was praying, “If only I could die like that!” The seeds of virtue that she had sown in her mindstream and her strong aspiration to benefit others ripened naturally, bringing great benefit, even in her death.



How does the grieving process work when we lose someone with whom we were in a painful or complicated relationship?

Recognise that the person acted in harmful ways because he or she was confused, unhappy and miserable. The person didn’t know how to create happiness, and so the actions he or she did in an attempt to relieve his or her suffering caused more suffering instead of bringing happiness. That person was not an evil person who was trying to harm us but that he or she was simply overwhelmed by his or her own confusion and

pain. In the same way, we, too, are caught in the cycle of existence under the influence of ignorance, anger and attachment, wanting happiness and not knowing the causes of happiness or being mistaken about the causes of happiness.

We, too, have acted in ways that at the time we thought were good, but years later we see were mistaken. Knowing this from our own experience, we can understand the other person's confusion. When someone acts in an abusive way, we should distance ourselves from him. That doesn't mean you have to hate him. We can still have feelings of kindness and compassion, but we don't have to stay in an abusive situation. In this way, we forgive and generate compassion to the person. Letting go of anger we have towards others is important, whether that person is dead or alive.

DHARMA AND SUICIDE

When my mind is overwhelmed with despair and depression and the thought of ending my life comes into my mind, what can I do?

Ask for help. All of us have experienced despair and depression at one time or another. When these feelings last a long time and we don't yet have the skills to deal with them, it is important to ask a friend, relative, doctor, counsellor, teacher, religious adviser or another trusted person for help. Sometimes when the depression is extremely severe, medications help to uplift the mind enough so that the person can then engage in spiritual practice and therapy.

A young man once told me that when despair overwhelms him, he would think of taking his life. It occurred to me that it wasn't really that he wanted to end his life; he wanted to end his suffering. Everyone wants to end his or her suffering. That is a reasonable wish. The question is: Does ending our life end our suffering?

From a Buddhist viewpoint, our mindstream continues after death. Thus ending our life stops the suffering of this life, but it doesn't stop our suffering in general. We will be reborn. Another young man who had experienced a great deal of abuse in his life told me that while he had thought of suicide previously, once he learned about rebirth his suicidal ideas ended because he realised that ending his life would not bring about what he really wanted — the end of his suffering. Instead, he realised that he must change the way his mind thinks in order to stop his suffering. He began to learn and practise the Dharma in order to do that.

Care and affection for others, or feelings of being connected with others are important elements in living a peaceful life. Related to that is knowing and trusting that there is something basically good and pure about human beings, despite our suffering and disturbing emotions. We have special potential simply because we have a mind/heart, and our life is not one condemned to alienation, self-hatred, guilt and resentment. In Buddhism, we call this potential "Buddha nature" — the clear and knowing nature of our mind/heart that

is the foundation upon which we can develop amazing qualities such as impartial love and compassion for all living beings and wisdom that knows the ultimate reality of all existence. These two — the feeling of connection with others that leads to compassion and the awareness of our inner goodness or “potential for enlightenment” — are related to suicide and healing after the suicide of a dear one.

Let's investigate how they are related to suicide itself. Suicide often stems from depression. While depression may be due to chemical imbalance or interfering forces in some cases, generally certain prominent thoughts ransack the mind, provoking some people to consider suicide as a way to alleviate their misery. These are thoughts such as, “My life is useless,” “There is no hope for happiness in my life,” and “I am not worthy enough to live.”

On what grounds does the thought “My life is useless” arise? It is based on feeling disconnected with others or with our shared environment. We can see that while such a thought may exist, its contents are unrealistic for, in fact, we are deeply connected with and related to all living beings. We depend on one another throughout our lives.

How can we oppose this unrealistic view? The Buddha laid out a series of meditations designed to develop love and compassion. Just telling ourselves to feel loving, loved or connected does not work. We have to actively train our mind/heart to look at life from

a different perspective. When this is done, positive emotions will naturally arise.

The foundation of this training is recognising that we and others are equal in wanting happiness and wishing to avoid suffering. We contemplate this deeply and repeatedly, not just saying the words at an intellectual level, but also bringing them into our heart. In this way, we train our mind/heart so that every time we see any living being — no matter who they are, whether we like them or not — our spontaneous awareness is “This living being is exactly like me. The most important thing for him or her is to have happiness and avoid suffering. Recognising this, I understand something very important and intimate about others. We are indeed deeply interconnected.”

Although we may have never met that person before, we know that this is his or her deepest wish. Even animals and insects have happiness and the eradication of misery as the most important purposes of their lives. By continually training our mind to see everyone in this way, we will no longer feel alienated. Instead, we will feel and know that we are a part of this interconnected body of living beings. We belong, we understand others and they can understand us. Our actions affect them; we are not isolated, walled-in units, but part of the seamless stream of living beings throughout this universe. Our problems are not unique and hopeless. We can reach out to help other beings and contribute to their happiness, even in small ways

that become deeply meaningful. In addition, we allow ourselves to receive others' affection and aid. Our life has a purpose.

Not only do our lives have meaning, but also we deserve to live. We are worthy living beings. Why? Because our basic nature is pure and has unlimited potential for the development of magnificent qualities. Although disturbing emotions arise in our mind from time to time, they are not us. They are mental events, things that arise, pass through and leave our minds. We are not our thoughts and feelings. They are not us. When we sit in meditation and are mindful of our thoughts and feelings, this becomes quite evident. Underneath them is the basic, clear and knowing nature of our mind/heart which is free from all thoughts and emotions. On a deeper level, our nature is like the pure and clear, open sky. Clouds may pass through the sky but the sky and the clouds are not the same. Even when the clouds are present, the pure and open sky still exists; it can never be destroyed. Similarly, the nature of our mind is not inherently defiled; the disturbing attitudes and emotions are adventitious.

Disturbing emotions and thoughts are not only transient; they are also distorted. They are neither accurate views of what is happening nor beneficial responses to it. Instead of believing everything we think and feel, let's investigate our thoughts and feelings to discern if they are accurate and beneficial. Should we discover they aren't, we apply antidotes by training

our mind to view situations in a different way, one that is more realistic and beneficial. As we do this, we discover that our view on life changes, we discover our inner goodness. We are worthwhile and have been so all along, only now we see this.



How can I cultivate compassion and confidence in goodness while healing from the pain of losing a loved one to suicide?

Let's look at how the qualities mentioned earlier — interconnection, compassion and potential for enlightenment — relate to those healing from suicide. First, compassion for ourselves and for the one who committed suicide is called for. It is easy for our ego-mind to feel guilty and blame ourselves for another's suicide. It is easy for the ego-mind to be angry at the suicidal person for taking his or her life and causing us to suffer. It is easy for the ego-mind to sink into grief of losing a loved one and immerse ourselves in self-pity. But these emotions are like clouds in the sky of the spacious purity of our mind/heart. They are not us, we are not them. They arise and pass through our minds. We don't need to grasp onto them or to fight them. Imbuing them with a reality that they lack is not beneficial.

This is especially true with guilt and self-blame. Thinking, “if only I had done xyz, my loved one would not have committed suicide” is not realistic. The other person chose to end his life. We cannot control his mind and his choices. We can influence people but we cannot control them. We may try to influence them in one direction, but their mind chooses to go in another.

The disturbing emotions of guilt, anger, resentment, self-pity and so on are functions of our self-preoccupied attitude. This self-centredness or ego-mind has kept us trapped in misery from time without beginning. Not only is self-centredness not beneficial for our own and others' happiness, it is also not realistic. There are infinite living beings in the universe so our happiness and misery are not all that exists. Our suffering is not the only suffering. Let's place our own pain within the perspective of all the varied experiences that living beings have at this moment.

That doesn't mean we are bad if we temporarily get stuck in disturbing emotions. Let's not add another layer of delusion on top of what we are already feeling by telling ourselves that we are selfish and wrong for being depressed or self-preoccupied. Rather, since those are unrealistic and unbeneficial feelings, let's ask ourselves, “What are the more realistic and suitable ones? How do I cultivate them?”

Here is where compassion for ourselves comes in. Compassion is not self-pity. Rather, it is acknowledging our pain and confusion, wishing for ourselves to be

free from them, and then letting go of them. With compassion for ourselves, we can move on and re-invigorate our life.

What do we move on to? What do we consciously cultivate? A heart that cares about others. The feeling of connection and compassion we have for the dear one who committed suicide is for one living being. There are infinite living beings throughout the universe. What would happen if we were to tear down the walls of clinging to one person and open our hearts to loving all beings simply because they exist? We can share the love we have for one person with many others, increasing our capacity to give and receive love while we do so.

Many of those who have survived the death of a loved one due to suicide have used compassion for others to help themselves heal. Immediately after the suicide, the loss is fresh, and grieving — the process of adapting to new circumstances — is just beginning. Some of you may not yet be ready to step into far-reaching compassion. But trust yourself that you will reach the point where you can transform your experience in such a way that activates you to reach out and help others.

Your mind may have the tendency to get stuck in self-centred patterns of thinking, replaying an event repeatedly in your mind. Remember that your dear one died once and it was over. But each time you replay the mental video entitled “what if..” or “how could he have?” you experience the trauma again. Learn to

catch yourself when you start to replay these mental videos. Push the mental “stop” button and come back to the present moment. Enjoy this moment because it is what exists right now.

It is important to place your grief in context. Every one of us has experienced unbelievable pain. That does not discount our individual suffering, but it places it in the context of the big picture. That big picture is that pain and grief exist and they have no owner. We don't have a monopoly on it; no individual has a monopoly on pain. We are all the same in wanting happiness and wishing to be free from suffering. Feel that sameness; know that you share the same wish with all other living beings. Feel compassion for all those who experience misery like you. Send them your love, care, compassion and understanding.

Your relationship with the one who committed suicide is not the only relationship in your life. You have a full life and there is goodness in your heart to share with others. Avoid getting stuck in a narrow way of thinking that focuses only on this one person. Also, when thinking about your dear one, remember that he or she had a full life too. That person's entire life was not misery, and the meaning and value of his or her life is not defined by how he or she died. Let the fullness of that person's life and your life fill your heart.



What is the role of meditation in developing these new perspectives for healing after suicide?

Meditation can be very helpful. First, we must learn the methods for developing love, compassion, wisdom and so on. Then we contemplate them, applying them to our lives. Meditation gives us quiet time with ourselves to familiarise ourselves with these beneficial viewpoints and techniques.

Many forms of meditation exist. One, among these is mindfulness meditation. Here, we may focus on our breath, physical sensations, feelings, mind or thoughts and simply observe them, letting them arise and pass away without clinging onto them. By doing this, we come to see these as simply events, nothing permanent or static to be attached to or hold onto. Our mind relaxes. We also begin to see that these mental and physical events are not us; we see that there is no solid “I” or “mine” to control or possess all these events. This releases the stress in our minds.

A second type of meditation is the “analytic” or “checking” meditation. Here, a genre of teachings entitled “mind training” or “thought transformation” is very effective. The thought transformation teachings instruct us how to actively develop a feeling of connection equally for all living beings. They show the method to cultivate love, compassion, joy and equanimity. They also teach us the useful skill of transforming adverse circumstances into the path to enlightenment.

Let me recommend a few books on this topic:

Transforming Adversity into Joy and Courage by Geshe Jampa Tegchok, *Advice from a Spiritual Friend* by Geshe Ngawang Dhargye and Geshe Rabten, *Mind Training like Rays of the Sun* by Nam-kha Pel, *Mindfulness in Plain English* by Bhante Gunaratana, and the *Miracle of Mindfulness* by Thich Nhat Hanh. You may also want to attend talks given by qualified Buddhist teachers.



What kind of meditation can someone who has lost a loved one to suicide do? Can a person from other religions do the meditation?

Buddhism is a philosophy of life, a way of living in an ethical and compassionate manner. Many of the Buddha's teachings are simply common sense and can be applied by anyone, no matter what religion he or she follows. The following is a guided meditation for someone who has lost a loved one to suicide.

Each paragraph is a step in the meditation, an individual point to contemplate. Read a step and then stop and contemplate it. Look at things from that perspective. Let the feeling described in that step fill your heart. When you are ready, go on to the next step.

1. Imagine your loved one when he or she was healthy and active. Look at your dear one fondly

and think, “I’m so glad that we were able to share life together for as long as we did. I’m so glad that you were part of my life.” Rejoice that you knew that person.

2. In your mind, say to your loved one, “Everything in life changes — things begin and they end and something new happens after that. We and everything around us are in constant flux. I know we can’t be together always. Even though our separation happened sooner than I would have liked or expected, I’m so glad we knew each other.” While appreciating that you knew that person, let yourself accept that change occurs.
3. You and your dear one loved each other. No matter whether your relationship with your dear one was usually peaceful or often contentious, the underlying feeling is one of love, of wishing each other well. Bring that feeling into your heart and know that no matter what pain either of you may have felt at various times; no matter how confused your loved one might have been; no matter what he or she may have done due to his or her confusion and pain, the basis of your relationship was love and wishing each other well. Nothing can change that. Feel that love.
4. Based on that affection, forgive the person for anything hurtful he or she may have said or done during the whole duration of your relationship with him or her. Forgive yourself for anything

hurtful you may have said or done towards him or her during the time you knew each other. Let go of all conflicted or tumultuous feelings. Let your mind be peaceful.

5. Say to the person, "Although I can't imagine the suffering that made you take your life, I know that suffering and confusion are not your essence. I know that grief and feelings of guilt are not my essence. May we and all beings have happiness and its causes. May we and all beings be free from suffering and its causes."
6. Look at the person again, with love, and bid him or her farewell, at least for this life. Think, "Wherever you are now, I wish you well. I want you to be happy and to be free from suffering. You have a different experience now, and so do I. So as we both go on, I wish you well. My love is with you."
7. Feel the love and compassion in your heart and know that it is not limited to one or even a handful of individuals. Love is not something of limited quantity. So take that love and compassion in your heart and share it with the world. Be kind to anyone who is in front of you at any particular moment, for at that moment that person is the embodiment and representative of all beings for you.

What is your view on seeing suicide as an honourable action?

Thinking that suicide is the only honourable exit to save the family name is a mistaken thought. Some cultures may hold this view, but according to the Buddha, taking one's own life is a tragic action done out of ignorance. It benefits neither one's family nor oneself.



**What happens to people who commit suicide?
Where do they go?**

We cannot make general statements about these topics because we do not know for sure the state of each individual's mind at the time of death or the karma he or she has created in the past. Many people who commit suicide are in a great deal of emotional pain, and an angry or depressed mental state can be a fertile field for the ripening of previously created negative karma which bring unpleasant results.

From a Buddhist perspective, people are not punished or rewarded for their actions. The idea of punishment and reward presupposes the existence of a supreme being who is punishing and rewarding others. Buddhists do not accept the existence of such a being who determines sentient beings' fate. Instead, the Buddha taught that our mind is the creator of

our experiences. That is, we experience the result of our own physical, verbal and mental actions. Actions motivated by kindness and other constructive mental states bring happiness; actions motivated by clinging attachment, anger and other disturbing emotions bring suffering.

While suicide is not a complete action of killing, it is a form of taking life. As a destructive action, it plants a seed in the person's mindstream to experience future suffering. Although the person who committed suicide is seeking relief from suffering, the action of suicide itself coupled with the person's mental state at the time of death are often not conducive for ceasing suffering. That is, while the suffering of this life ends, not all suffering ends.

For that reason, suicide is considered a great tragedy. Everyone has the Buddha potential — the innate potential to become a fully enlightened being. While this potential does not end at death, a human life is an excellent opportunity for making good use of our Buddha potential. As human beings, we can understand the Buddha's teachings and put them into practice. By doing so, it is possible to eliminate all suffering and its causes — ignorance, mental afflictions and karma — so that all rebirth in cyclic existence ceases. Furthermore, it is possible to develop remarkable qualities such as impartial love, compassion and wisdom — qualities through which we can contribute to the well-being of others, qualities that create the causes for happiness

for ourselves and others, now and in the future. Thus, when someone's mind is so painful or confused that he or she seeks to end this precious opportunity for spiritual cultivation, it is a great sorrow.

However, if people are unable to see their potential and the value of their lives, and if they are in great emotional turmoil or physical pain, they may see suicide as relieving their anguish. They made this choice. Others are not responsible for the suicide of their dear ones; there is no reason to feel guilty.

In terms of where people go after death, as there is no solid, inherently existing person who lives, so there is no inherently existent person who dies and is reborn. The Buddha taught no-self; that is, there is not a soul or findable essence that is immutably or inherently a person. Don't think of your dear one who has died as someone with the same personality, memory and so on, only that now you cannot see her. While the continuity of the mental consciousness takes rebirth, that mental consciousness changes moment by moment; it is not the person. According to causes and conditions — including previous karma — the ever-changing mental consciousness is attracted to a new rebirth. Once reborn, there is a new person — the person of the new life — who exists by being merely labelled in dependence on the body and mind of the new life.



Which karmic seeds ripen at the time of death?

According to causes and conditions, karmic seeds ripen at any specific moment. The karmic seed that ripens at the time of death is not predetermined. Some people think that at the time of death, all the karma is weighed up and the new rebirth is a result of the sum total of karma. That is not correct. Our mind is like a field and the karmic seeds are like the seeds of various types of plants which have been scattered in it. Depending on which area of the field receives fertiliser, water and sunshine, certain seeds will ripen. The others remain in the field until such a time when they receive water, fertiliser and sunlight.

Within our beginningless lifetimes, we have created many different actions, so in our mind there are seeds that will ripen in happiness and seeds that will ripen in suffering. Within one day, we do so many different physical, verbal and mental actions and thus plant a variety of different seeds in our mind. Similarly, each day we experience so many different events and feelings — some pleasant or desirable, others not. Each day we are experiencing the results of many different karmic seeds.

At the time of death, the Indian sage, Vasubandhu said that the order of the ripening of karma that will propel a new rebirth is as follows:

Actions cause fruition
In cyclic existence — first the heavy,
Then the proximate, then the accustomed,
Then what was done before

The first kind of seeds that are likely to ripen at death are from *powerful actions*. If we have done a very powerful action, even once, these will ripen first. Extremely heavy destructive actions are for example: killing our father, mother or an arhat, causing a schism in the Sangha community and injuring a Buddha. Other heavy karma includes those created by engaging in the ten non-virtues — killing, stealing, unwise sexual conduct, lying, disharmonious speech, harsh speech, idle talk, covetousness, maliciousness and distorted views — with a strong intention and with all the branches of the action complete — preparation, action and conclusion. Very heavy constructive actions may also ripen first. These are, for example, the ten virtues*, which are opposite of the ten non-virtues. Actions done with strong love, compassion and altruism, as well as virtuous actions done in relationship to the Triple Gem are also heavy.

If some karmic seeds are equal in weight, the seeds of actions done most recently will ripen. *Habitual actions* are the next to ripen. We are creatures of habit, and by doing a seemingly insignificant action repeatedly, the karma becomes strong. For example, frequently

* *The ten virtues are protecting life, widespread giving, maintaining ethics, speaking truthfully, speaking harmoniously by mediating among divided groups, speaking lovingly, peacefully and meaningfully, cultivating admiration, satisfaction and contentment, becoming helpful, loving and compassionate and cultivating correct views.*

telling “little lies” leaves strong karmic seeds on the mindstream over time. Bowing and making offerings to the Three Jewels of Refuge each morning become strong virtuous karma over time.

The thoughts we have while we are dying also influence which of our karma ripens first. This applies too while we are alive. When our minds are calm and peaceful, we generally find ourselves in better circumstances than when our minds are upset and angry. Our behaviour also influences what karma ripens. For instance, getting intoxicated makes it much easier for destructive karma to ripen in the form of accidents and so forth.

If clinging and attachment (not wanting to leave this life, clinging to relatives, clinging to the body) fill the mind while a person is dying, or if the mind is filled with anger (anger at dying, resentment for things that happened years ago) at the time of death, it is easier for the seeds of destructive karma to ripen. However, if a dying person takes refuge in the Three Jewels, remembers his or her spiritual mentor, generates bodhicitta, or gives his or her possessions away in genuine charity, it is more likely that constructive karmic seeds ripen during the time of the person's death.



NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

Thoughts about dying and putting an early end to life are not uncommon and occur to many. You may have had morbid thoughts about dying and ending your own life, or perhaps you know someone who does.

Depression Could Be The Cause.

Clinical depression — a serious medical illness linked to changes in the biochemistry of the brain — is believed to contribute to at least half of all suicides. It affects the way a person feels about himself and how he thinks about things. Characterised by overwhelming feelings of sadness lasting for more than two weeks, clinical depression is very different from a temporary case of “the blues” triggered by an unhappy event.

Depression is often accompanied by a loss of interest in life, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, and can be triggered in somebody who is going through stressful or traumatic life events, or who is terminally ill. Such distressing feelings generally require the attention of a healthcare professional and treatment with medications. If you or someone you love needs help, you can call:

- *Shan You Counselling Centre at 6741 9293*
- *The SBL Vision Family Service Centre at 6544 2263*
- *Hearty Care Centre at 6295 4622 and 629 4749*
- *Whispering Hearts Family Service Centre at 6795 1008*

- *Samaritans of Singapore's 24-hour suicide prevention helpline at 1800-221-4444*



Death Doesn't End the Suffering.

People who contemplate committing suicide may think that suicide is the only way that can take away the pain and end their suffering. But in Buddhism, death is only the beginning of another cycle of rebirth where, again there are problems. In addition, suicide causes pain and suffering for others and yourself. According to the Buddhist teaching of the Four Noble Truths, life lived under the control of ignorance and karma is full of dissatisfactions. The Buddha taught that the end to suffering and to unsatisfactory conditions is possible by following the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Buddha also taught us to realise the *impermanence* and *insubstantiality* of both life and death. Everything changes constantly. Nothing stays the same. Rain might come after sunshine, but so does sunshine come after rain. In the realisation that people (their personalities, interests and attitudes) and life situations are not fixed and are constantly changing, it becomes possible to approach each moment with an open mind. One is then able to act and adapt to new situations without clinging to outdated and deleterious conceptions.

We can live more in the present without hanging

on to the past or worrying about the future since each phenomenon arises depending on causes and conditions. Similarly, everything passes away and becomes something new in each moment. In Buddhism, the mind/heart is also seen as the root of all good and all evil, the cause of both suffering and True Happiness. The Buddha taught the mind/heart is the primary factor that determines the well-being of each person. Through meditation and counselling, the perception of reality for those with persistent negative thinking can be adjusted. This will enable them to better cope with the unexpected changes of life.



Buddhism's Perspective to Suicide



“If one knows how to treasure oneself, one should protect oneself well.”
~ *The Buddha (Dhammapada)*

“According to the Buddhist teaching of cause and effect, since one does not realise the truth of all phenomena, or does not practise to be liberated from life and death, suicide is pointless. When one’s karmic retribution is not exhausted, death by suicide only leads to another cycle of rebirth. This is why Buddhists do not support suicide; and instead, encourage constructive living, using this life to diligently practise good, thus changing the present and the future for the better.”

~ Chan Master Sheng Yen

“Some people commit suicide; they seem to think that there is suffering simply because there is the human life, and that by cutting off the life there will be nothing... But, according to the Buddhist viewpoint, that’s not the case; your consciousness will continue. Even if you take your own life, this life, you will have to take another body that again will be the basis of suffering. If you really want to get rid of all your suffering, all the difficulties you experience in your life, you have to get rid of the fundamental cause (greed, hatred and delusion) that gives rise to the aggregates that are the basis of all suffering. Killing yourself isn’t going to solve your problems.”

~ His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

“Taking one’s own life under any circumstances is morally and spiritually wrong. Taking one’s own life owing to frustration or disappointment only causes greater suffering. Suicide is a cowardly way to end one’s problems of life. A person cannot commit suicide if his mind is pure and tranquil. If one leaves this world with a confused and frustrated mind, it is most unlikely

that he would be born again in a better condition. Suicide is an unwholesome or unskilful act since it is encouraged by a mind filled with greed, hatred and delusion. Those who commit suicide have not learnt how to face their problems, how to face the facts of life, and how to use their mind in a proper manner. Such people have not been able to understand the nature of life and worldly conditions.”

~ Venerable K. Sri Dhammananda

“This human body and life is difficult to attain but is now attained. The Buddha’s teachings are difficult to encounter but are now encountered. If we do not use this precious body to help ourselves, till when shall we wait to save ourselves?”

~ Buddhist Saying

DHARMA AND THE PRISON: MAKING FRIENDS WITH OURSELVES

Opening Meditation

Begin by being aware of sitting here in this room, on the cushion. Be aware that you are sharing the space with other people who support your spiritual interests, and give your support to them as well. (pause)

Be aware of the sensations in your feet and legs. If there is any tension there, let it relax. (pause)

Be aware of the sensations in your back, shoulders, chest and arms. Some people store their tension in their shoulders. If you are one of them, it is helpful to lift your shoulders up towards your ears, tuck your chin in a little bit and let your shoulders drop forcefully. You

can do that a couple of times to relax your shoulders. (pause)

Be aware of the sensations in your neck, jaw and face. Some people clench their jaw tensely. If you are one of them, let your jaw relax. Make sure all your facial muscles are relaxed as well. (pause)

Be aware that the position of your body is firm, but also at ease. Being firm and stable can go hand-in-hand with being relaxed. Similarly, your mind can be stable and firm without being tense. It can be relaxed without being careless. (pause)

This is how we prepare the body. Now let's prepare the mind. We do this by cultivating our motivation. Begin by asking yourself, "What was my motivation for coming here this evening?" There is no right or wrong answer, just be inquisitive. "What was my motivation for coming? Why did I come here?" (pause)

Now whatever your initial motivation was, let's build on it and make it an expansive motivation. Think, "Through meditating and listening to the Dharma, may I be better able to serve and benefit others. May the action I am about to do lead to my own and others' liberation from suffering and our enlightenment."

Generate the mind of loving compassion that wants to practise the Dharma and that seeks full enlightenment. We do this for our own benefit as well as for the benefit of each and every sentient being. This is the motivation we want to generate. (pause)

Now turn your focus to your breath. Breathe

normally and naturally. Be aware of each inhalation and exhalation. Observe what is happening in your body and mind as you breathe. You may want to place your attention at your upper lip and nostrils, being aware of the sensation of the air as it goes in and out. Or, you may find it easier to concentrate if you focus on your belly and observe its rising and falling as you breathe. Or, you could place your mindfulness on the breath going in and out of your body in general. In any case, choose one of the above and stay with it throughout the entire meditation.

Periodically, with introspection “spy” on your mind. Check if you are still mindful of the breath or if your mind has become distracted or dull. If you are distracted by a sensation, thought or sound, recognise that and bring your mindfulness back to the breath. If your mind is becoming dull, check your position: make sure your back is straight and your head level. Keep your eyes a wee bit open, gazing downwards. They are not looking at anything, but light is entering and that helps prevent drowsiness. By staying mindful of one object, in this case the breath, let your mind settle down and become peaceful.

While you are breathing, allow yourself to be content sitting here and breathing. What you are doing is good enough. Be satisfied with what is happening now: you are sitting in a safe place, breathing. How wonderful that is! We will sit in silence now for a while, being mindful of our breath. (pause, then bell)

Becoming Friends with Ourselves

We began the meditation by cultivating a good motivation. This is an important part of Buddhist practice. Being aware of our motivation increases our knowledge about ourselves. Consciously cultivating a motivation of love, compassion and altruism towards others helps us to become friends with ourselves. In addition, the karmic seeds we create by our actions are largely based on our motivation. These karmic seeds influence what we will experience in the future.

We have to look at our mind and examine our motivations. What are we feeling? What are we thinking? What is going on inside of us? Our mind generates an intention. Then, due to this motivation, we speak or do physical actions. Except for bodily reflexes, we don't speak or act without the mind first having an intention. So we have to watch what our mind is thinking and feeling because our thoughts and feelings motivate our speech and actions. We know that what we say and do influence how others act towards us and what we experience in our lives. Since we all want happiness and not suffering, it is to our benefit to speak and act carefully. To do that well, we have to be aware of what is happening in our mind.

When I first encountered the Dharma, one of the things that really appealed to me was the Buddha's emphasis on being aware of my motivations. This put me squarely in front of myself. I couldn't wiggle out by trying to look good outside. We can try to look good

all we want, we can try to impress other people, but getting them to think well of us doesn't mean we are creating virtuous karma. Manipulating people so that they will do something for us doesn't mean we are putting good energy into our mindstream. It's quite the contrary: a motivation in which we are looking out only for our own immediate pleasure puts destructive karmic seeds into our mindstream.

Our motivations and our intentions are what leave karmic seeds on our mindstream. The long-term effects of our actions are not determined by what other people think about us, not what they say about us, not whether we are praised or blamed. What is going on in our own heart and mind is what determines the type of karmic seeds that are placed on our mindstream. And these karmic seeds are what create our experiences of happiness and suffering in life.

Let me give an example that illustrates the importance of our internal motivation, not how we appear to others. Imagine that a welfare society wants to build a clinic in a poor neighbourhood and is seeking donations for this purpose. A really rich person gives a million dollars. The thought in this person's mind when he donated the money is, "When the clinic is completed, there will be a plaque with my name in the foyer. Other people will know that I'm the chief benefactor of the clinic." That is his motivation. Another person, who doesn't have much money, gives ten dollars. But her motivation is, "It's fantastic that

there will be a clinic here. May everyone who comes to this clinic be instantly cured of all their diseases and ailments. May all their injuries heal quickly. May they abide in happiness.”

In this scenario, there is one person giving a million dollars with one motivation and another person giving ten dollars with a different motivation. In general society, who do we say is the generous person? The one who gives a million dollars. That person gets so much credit and everyone goes, “Look at him. He is so generous and kind.” Others make a big deal out of him and completely ignore the person who gives ten dollars.

But when we examine the motivations of the donors, who is the generous one? It is the one who gave ten dollars. Was the person who gave a million dollars generous? From the point of view of his motivation, was there any generosity? No, he was doing it for the benefit of his own ego. He did it to gain status in the community. He came out looking good in people’s eyes, and others thought he was generous. But in terms of the karma he created, it was not a generous action. Meanwhile, the person who did not receive others’ acclaim is the generous person.

In Dharma practice we have to face ourselves honestly. Dharma is like a mirror and we use it to look at ourselves. What’s going in my mind? What’s my intention? What are my motivations? This kind of investigation into the workings of our own mind and

heart produces real change in us. This brings about actual mental purification. Being a spiritual person is not about doing things that look spiritual; it is about actually transforming our mind.

Most of the time, we are totally unaware of our motivations. People live on auto-pilot. They get up in the morning, eat breakfast, go to work, have lunch, work some more in the afternoon, have dinner, read a book, watch TV, talk with friends and collapse into bed. An entire day is gone! What was the motivation underlying all of their actions? They have such incredible potential, human intelligence and a precious human rebirth. But what was their motivation for everything they did? They surely had motivations, but they weren't aware of them. When they went to take their breakfast, their motivation was probably, "I'm hungry. I want to eat something that tastes good." Then they ate with that motivation.

When we wake up in the morning, what is our motivation for living that day? What is the thought that gets us out of bed in the morning? We wake up and what are our first thoughts? What are we seeking in life when we wake up?

Many times we just roll over and complain, "Ugh, that alarm again! I want to stay in bed." Then we think, "Coffee, oh coffee, that sounds good, some pleasure. I'll get out of bed for coffee. Breakfast will follow and that will give me pleasure so I'll get out of bed." Many of our motivations involve seeking

pleasure. We seek an external object, situation, or person to make us feel good ASAP. If somebody gets in our way when we are trying to get pleasure, we get mad and take it out on them, “You’re interfering with my pleasure! You’re preventing me from getting what I want! How dare you!!” Ill-will and malice arise in our mind and these thoughts place destructive karmic seeds on our mindstream. These thoughts motivate us to speak harshly or behave aggressively, which creates destructive karma. As the ones who create the karma, we are the ones who experience the results of our own actions.

We wake up in the morning and straight away seek our own immediate pleasure. Is that the meaning or purpose of human life? It doesn’t seem very meaningful, does it? We just seek pleasure, help our friends and harm our enemies. If people give us pleasure they are our friends; if people get in our way they are our enemies. This seems natural, but is it reasonable? Is helping our friends and harming our enemies the purpose of our lives?

Dogs also help their friends and harm their enemies. If you give a dog a biscuit, he considers you his friend for life. You give that dog a little bit of pleasure and now he loves you. But if you take the dog’s food away from him, he will consider you an enemy because you are depriving him of pleasure.

The mind grasps onto pleasure. It gets upset when someone interferes with its anticipated pleasure. Our

slogan is “I want what I want when I want it!” and we expect the world to co-operate with us. We make friends and help them because they do things that benefit us. We get upset when people do things we don't like; we call them names and want to harm them. This is how most people live.

From the Buddhist point of view, we have a much greater human potential than just seeking pleasure and being mad at the people who interfere with that. Just looking out for our own immediate welfare is not the meaning or purpose of life.

Since all these pleasures end very quickly, what is the use of greedily chasing after them or of retaliating if someone gets in our way? How long does the pleasure of eating breakfast last? It depends on if you are a fast eater or a slow eater, but either way it doesn't last longer than half an hour and then it is over.

We run around struggling for pleasure, but the pleasure doesn't last very long. We work so hard in our attempt to have a feel-good experience, and we retaliate against those people who obstruct our pleasurable experiences. But these experiences last a very short time. Meanwhile, the motivations that propel our self-centred actions leave destructive karmic imprints in our mind. When we operate under the influence of jealousy, hostility and resentment, having destructive karmic seeds on our mindstream is the result. These seeds influence what we experience in the future. These seeds ripen and determine the situations we encounter and

whether we will be happy or miserable. Sometimes, the seeds ripen in this life, other times in future lives. But unless we purify destructive seeds, they will definitely ripen and give rise to unhappiness and pain.

It is ironic that even though we want happiness, we create the causes for unhappiness when our actions are motivated by the self-centred thought, “My happiness now is the most important thing in the world.” Whenever we act with a selfish or greedy mind, we are putting that energy into our consciousness. Is the selfish, greedy mind relaxed and peaceful? Or is it tight and clinging? Besides affecting our future experiences by leaving karmic seeds, just contemplate how these emotions make us feel right now? Examine your own experience: are you happy when anger or craving wells up in your mind?

The Buddha said that we have incredible human potential. That Buddha potential allows us to become fully enlightened beings. Enlightened beings may seem very abstract to you. What does it mean to be a fully enlightened being?

One of the qualities of a fully enlightened being or Buddha is that anger and the seeds of anger and resentment have been totally eliminated from the mindstream in such a way that they can never reappear. What would it feel like not to have even the potential for anger or hatred in your mind? Can you even imagine what that would feel like? Think about it: No matter what somebody says to you, no matter

what somebody does to you, your mind is peaceful. You calmly accept what is happening and have compassion for the other person. You don't feel beaten down or disrespected and maintain your self-confidence no matter how others treat you. There is no possibility at all for anger, hatred or resentment to arise in you.

Thinking about the possibility of never getting angry again inspires me. Anger is a big problem with a lot of people. Wouldn't it be wonderful never to get angry again? This happens not by stuffing the anger down — because repressing anger does not eliminate it. The anger affects us in other ways and makes a mess in our life even if we try to stuff it down. Buddhas, on the other hand, have eliminated the seeds of anger in their minds, so they are genuinely free from it.

Another quality of a Buddha is that a Buddha is satisfied with whatever there is. A Buddha doesn't have greed, possessiveness, clinging, craving or any other attachments. Imagine what it would be like to be totally satisfied. It wouldn't matter who you are with or what's going on, your mind wouldn't crave for more and better. Your mind would be satisfied with what is in the moment. You would be able to enjoy what is happening and whomever you are with at this present moment.

How different that would be from our present state of mind! I don't know about you, but my mind is continually saying, "I want more! I want better! I like this. I don't like that. Do it this way, and don't do it that

way.” In other words, my mind loves to complain. What a nuisance the dissatisfied, complaining mind is!

When we think about a Buddha’s qualities, we get an idea of our potential — the possibility to be completely free from craving, dissatisfaction and hostility. We also have the potential to develop equal love and compassion for every living being. This means that anytime you meet anybody, your instant reaction would be one of closeness, affection and care for that person. Think about that: wouldn’t it be great to have that as your automatic reaction to everyone? It would be so different from how our out-of-control mind acts now. Now when we meet somebody, what is our first reaction? We think, “What can I get out of this person?” or “What are they going to try to get out of me?” There is so much fear and distrust in our reactions. These are only conceptual thoughts, but they sure create a lot of pain inside us. Don’t you find fear and distrust painful?

What would it be like — even here in prison — to be able to greet each person you meet with an open heart? What would it be like to have a heart that feels kindness and closeness instantly towards everyone? How wonderful it would be if you could see that nasty guard who you normally can’t stand and be peaceful! Wouldn’t it be great to be able to look into his heart and have a feeling of kindness and affection for him? We wouldn’t lose anything by doing that. Instead, we would gain a lot of inner peace. Don’t immediately tell yourself it is impossible. Instead, try being less

judgmental, try being more pleasant to others. Give it a try and see what happens not only to your inner sense of well-being but also to how others treat you in return.

We have such incredible potential within us. We have the ability to transform our mind into the mind of a fully enlightened Buddha. Now that we have seen our human potential, let's live our lives in a meaningful way. Do you see that just looking out for "my pleasure ASAP" and getting "my way as much as possible" is a dead end? It is a waste of time, not because it's bad, but because it doesn't make much sense to put so much time and energy into things that bring so little happiness. Instead we see we have great human potential for magnificent happiness that comes from purifying our own mind and developing a kind heart. We prefer big happiness to small happiness, don't we? We would prefer long-lasting happiness and peace to a quick fix that leaves us feeling empty afterwards, wouldn't we? Then let's have confidence in our potential to follow the path and become enlightened beings, and let's act on that confidence by being more respectful and kinder to others. Let's develop that confidence by studying the Buddha's teachings and increasing our wisdom.

Right now our mind usually orientates externally. We believe that happiness and suffering come from outside of us. This is an ignorant state of mind. We assume that happiness comes from outside so we

want this and we want that. We are always trying to get something. One person wants a cigarette, another person wants cheesecake, but everybody wants something. Ultimately though, we are looking outside of ourselves for happiness. We end up spending our entire life mentally clinging to things that we think will bring us pleasure. Some of us try to control the world around us, to make everyone and everything the way we want it to be so that we can be happy. But has that ever worked? Has anyone ever succeeded at making the world and everyone in it conform to his idea of how they should be? No, no one has ever succeeded at controlling everything and everyone. But the real problem is we can't manage our own mind.

We keep trying to make other people what we want them to be. After all, we know how they should be, don't we? We have really good advice to offer all of them. We have a little advice for everyone else. We know exactly how our friends should improve so that we will be happy, how our parents should change, how our kids should change. We have advice for everyone! Sometimes we give them our wonderful and sagely advice, and what do they do? Nothing! They don't listen to us when we know the truth of how they should live, what they should do, and how they should change so that the world would be different and we would be happy. When we give others our wonderful and wise advice about how they should live their lives, what do they say to us? "Mind your own business," and that's if

they are being polite! When they are not being polite, well, you know what they say. Here we offer them our wonderful advice and they just disregard it. Can you imagine this? Such stupid people!

Of course when they give us their advice, do we listen? “Forget it. They don’t know what they are talking about,” we think.

The world view that believes happiness and suffering come from outside puts us in the situation of constantly trying to rearrange everybody and everything to make it the way we want it. We never succeed. Have we ever met anyone who has succeeded in making the world the way he or she wants it to be? Think of those you are jealous of — have they ever succeeded in making the world what they want it to be? Have they found any kind of lasting happiness by getting everything they want? They haven’t, have they?

Sometimes we look at others’ lives and think that something is missing in our life. This arises from the view that happiness and suffering come from outside, which prompts us to try to control and rearrange everybody and everything. But what we are missing is inside. The real source of our happiness and suffering is what is going on within us, not having “perfection” outside of us. Have you ever been in a beautiful place with the right people and still feel totally miserable? I think most of us have had that experience at one time or another. We finally find ourselves in a wonderful situation, but we are completely miserable. That is a

perfect example proving that happiness and suffering don't come from the outside.

As long as our mind has the seeds of clinging, ignorance and hostility, we are never going to find any kind of lasting happiness because these emotions will continue to arise and interfere with our happiness. All we have to do is look at our life and we can see that this has always been the case. It doesn't matter whether we are in prison or outside, this is what is going on inside us all. The real prison is the internal one of ignorance, clinging attachment and anger. Until we free ourselves from that prison, we will be miserable. But when we free ourselves of these disturbing emotions, we will be able to be happy even if our body is trapped in a super max prison!

The Buddha said that happiness and suffering depend on the inside — on what is going on within your own heart and mind. How you perceive the situation is what is going to determine whether you are happy or miserable. For example, we have all had the experience of going into a room full of strangers. Remember a time when you did that. Maybe your thoughts before going into that room were, “Uh oh, there are so many people in there and I don't know them. I don't know if I'm going to fit in. Maybe they won't like me. Maybe I won't like them. They're probably judgmental. I bet they all know one other and are friends with one other, and I'm going to be the only person whom nobody knows. They're going to leave me out. It's going to be horrible

in there.” If you think in this manner before you go into that room full of strangers, what is your experience going to be? It is going to be a self-fulfilling prophecy; you are going to feel left out, unhappy, judged. The entire incident happens in the way it does because of the way you are thinking. Your mind hasn't given others the chance to be kind to you because all it is seeing is your own fearful projections.

Now let's say that before you go into that room full of strangers you think, “Hmm, there are lots of people I don't know. I bet they have had really interesting life experiences and know about all things I've never heard of. They probably have a lot of interesting stories I could learn from too. It's going to be really interesting and enjoyable to meet these people. I get to ask them questions about their interests, their lives, and what they know about. I'll learn a lot, and it'll be fun!” If you go into that room full of strangers with that thought, what is your experience going to be? You are going to have a great time. The situation hasn't changed at all. The situation is exactly the same, but your experience has changed dramatically! All because of what you are thinking.

When I was a teenager, I hated it when my mother told me what to wear. Why? She was infringing on my independence. “I am an independent person. I can make up my own mind. I can do what I like. Don't tell me what to do, thank you very much. I'm sixteen years old and I know everything.” With such an attitude, I set

myself up for conflict with my mum. Every time she suggested I wear something, I would growl. It wasn't a happy situation for either of us.

Years later, when I became an adult, my parents were having some friends over. At breakfast, in front of my sister and sister-in-law, my mother said to me, "Why don't you wear such-and-such when the company comes this evening?" I said, "Okay." My sister and sister-in-law came to me afterwards and said, "We can't believe you were so cool with what she said, and we can't believe that she said that!" I replied, "Why not wear what she suggested? It makes her happy and doing something that gives her happiness does not harm me. In fact, I feel happier when I do that."

Here you can see the difference in my mind in those years. When I was younger, my mind framed what my parents said to me as, "They don't trust me. They don't respect me. They're infringing on my autonomy and independence. They're bossing me around." With this interpretation of their motivation, I was defensive and resistant. When I was older and more confident, they could say the exact same thing to me but my mind didn't perceive it in the same way. You see the difference? The situation was exactly the same, but what was different was my own mind.

When we deeply understand how our mind works to create our experiences, we see that we actually have the power to change these experiences. We have the power not by making other people do what we want or

by making other things be what we want them to be. Instead, we have the power to change our experiences by changing what is happening in our own mind.



Forgiveness

This is where forgiveness comes in. Forgiving others is very important. Each of us has experienced harm and hurt in our life. We can probably sit down and, without thinking twice, rattle off a list of the harm, hurt, injustices and unfairness that we have experienced. We can talk about them very easily, they are right there. We have a lot of baggage around past events and may carry around anger, resentment and grudges for decades. Sometimes, we become bitter or cynical. I sometimes think that is why old people are so bent over — not just because of feeble bones, but because they carry so much psychological weight. They carry their grudges and bitterness with them everywhere they go, no matter who they are with. Instead of seeing the glass as half-full, they see it as half-empty. Their unhappiness is based on their thoughts and emotions, which they never question or evaluate to see if they are realistic and beneficial. However, there is the possibility to let go of all that because it is all created by the mind. It is not external, objective reality at all.

Forgiveness heals our anguish. What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is nothing more than deciding, “I’m not going to be angry about this anymore. I’m going to let go of my pain by letting go of my anger.” Forgiveness doesn’t mean that what the other person did is okay. What they did may have been awful. In any case, it is in the past. It is not happening now. Forgiveness is our thinking, “I care about myself and want to be happy so I’m going to stop carrying around the baggage of all this hurt, resentment and anger.”

Forgiveness is not something we do for someone else; it is something we do for ourselves. Forgiveness instantly brings peace and calm in our mind. Holding onto anger and grudges makes us miserable.

Those of us who have meditated for a while will be able to remember some meditation sessions where we were sitting in a safe place with people we like. Then we remember an incident from fifteen years ago, and the inner dialogue begins, “I can’t believe it. That idiot, that jerk, he had the nerve to do that, unbelievable! I was so furious and I still am!” We sit there and ruminate, “He did this and then he did that. He hurt me. It was so unfair, people are always taking advantage of me. I’m going to stop them from doing that. Grrrrrrrrr!”

Then all of the sudden we hear the bell ring to conclude the meditation session. We open our eyes and are surprised, “Oh! Where was I during that meditation session? I was drowning in my made-up fantasies of

the past.” The past is only a figment in our conceptual mind, our memory. What happened in the past isn’t happening now. That person did what he did. Where is he now? Is he doing anything to us right now? No, we are sitting here, we are perfectly okay, nobody is doing anything to us, but boy! did we get mad!

Where did that anger come from? Sometimes we remember something that happened in the past — somebody said some biting words or somebody we really cared about walked out on us — and we feel this tremendous hurt. Feeling hurt is uncomfortable so we cover it up by getting angry, because that gives us a sense of power, even though it is a false sense of power. But where is the person who harmed us at this moment? That person is not here in front of us. Where is that situation right now? It is gone! It is non-existent! It is only a thought now.

It is so evident that what we remember and how we describe the past to ourselves can make us incredibly furious without anybody doing anything to us. We all have had that experience. The pain, anguish and anger are not coming from outside, because the other person is not here and the situation is not happening now. Those feelings arise because our mind got lost in its conceptions and interpretations of the past.

Forgiveness is thinking, “I’m tired of doing this. I’ve played and re-played that video of my life in my mind countless times. I know the ending, and I’m bored with this video.” We press the stop button. We put it down

and get on with our life instead of staying stuck in the past with so many painful emotions. The past is not happening now.

That is why I say forgiveness is so refreshing and healing for our own mind. We have this incredible human potential, such amazing inner human beauty, and we have decided not to waste it filling our mind with anger, resentment, fear and hurt. We have something more important, more valuable to do, and for that reason forgiveness is so important.

Sometimes, our mind says, “How can I forgive this person after all he did to me? He really wanted to hurt me.” Here, we are pretending to read others’ minds and to know their motivations. “That person wanted to hurt me. It was deliberate. He woke up that morning wanting to hurt me. I know it!” Is that true? Can we read his mind? Do we know another person’s motivations? In fact, we have no idea of the person’s intention. We have to admit that actually, we have no idea why that person did that action that we didn’t like.

Our mind thinks, “If the person did do it with a negative motivation, my anger is justified.” Is that true? If someone had a negative motivation and hurt you, is your anger justified? Other people can have all the negative motivations that they want. Why do we need to get angry at them? We think that when other people harm us, our only possible response is to hate them and be angry at them. Is that true? Is anger or

hate the only possible response that we can have? Of course not!

In seventh grade, a situation happened and I seethed with rage for years about it. My family's background is of a minority religion, I grew up Jewish. In the seventh grade, Peter, one of my classmates made some anti-Semitic remarks. I ran out of the classroom crying, went to the bathroom, and sobbed all day. I thought that was what you were supposed to do when you were insulted. You were supposed to be so angry that you cried. I thought that was the only way to respond when somebody made a cruel remark. I wasted a whole day crying in the bathroom at school because of Peter's anti-Semitic remarks. After that incident, even though we went all the way through high school and part of college together, I never spoke to him again. My attitude towards him was like a slab of cold, hard wall, because I thought I was supposed to behave in this way when someone disrespected me. For years, my anger was like a knife that stabs in my heart.

But, people can say whatever they want; it doesn't mean it is true. I don't have to feel insulted, nor do I have to interpret what he does as disrespect. I can still feel good about myself even when somebody makes a comment like that. It is not necessary to prove myself to anyone. Why trouble my own mind, getting bent out of shape because somebody said something like that? My classmate didn't make me angry. I made myself

angry by interpreting what he did in a certain way and holding onto it.

We can choose how we respond to things. If we observe closely, we will see there is a point at which we can choose our emotions. Many of our meditation practices are geared to help us look at our emotions and thoughts and discern which ones aren't realistic or beneficial and then to let them go. In this way, we cultivate a more realistic and beneficial outlook on the situation.

How else could I have perceived that classmate? Even if somebody says cruel and mean things deliberately, why do I need to get angry? If I look into that person's heart, what is he feeling? What is going on in the heart of a person who says harsh words? Is that person happy? No.

Can we understand that person's pain? Can we understand that he is unhappy? Forget about whether we like him or not. Here is a living being who is unhappy. We know what it is like to be unhappy. Can we understand his unhappiness, just as one living being to another? We can do that, can't we? When we know our own unhappiness, we are able to understand someone else's unhappiness. Just as we have compassion for ourselves — wanting ourselves to be free from suffering, so too can we have compassion for others, wanting them to be free from misery. Then, instead of hating the person for what he did, we wish him to be free from his inner pain that propelled him do what

he did. It is possible to look at someone who has hurt us with genuine compassion and wish him to be free from suffering.

Compassion is a much more appropriate response to people whom we do not like or to enemies than hatred is. If we hate somebody, we retaliate and deliberately inflict pain on that person. How does that affect the other person? He is hurt by what we do and becomes angry, and that motivates him to harm us again. The conflict just escalates and both of us are miserable, even if we cover it up with anger and vengeance.

We have the incorrect thought that when we hate somebody and come down hard on him, it will bring us happiness. Does retaliating make our life happier? It doesn't. Why not? Because when we are malicious to somebody, he will respond in kind. We then have to deal with that person doing more things to us that we don't like. Holding a grudge doesn't make us happy. It actually brings about the result that we don't want.

When we look into the heart of someone who is doing things that we don't like and we see he is doing that because he is unhappy, doesn't it make more sense to wish him happiness? If he were happy, if he had a peaceful mind, if he were contented, he wouldn't be acting the way he is. Think about somebody who really hurt you and recognise that he did what he did because he was in pain. He was confused and in pain. How do you know? Because people only do mean things when they are unhappy, when they are in pain. People don't

act cruelly when they are at peace within. Whatever others did that we found objectionable, they did because of their own confusion and unhappiness. No one wakes up in the morning and thinks, “I’m so happy today. I think I’ll go hurt someone.” They only act in harmful ways when their unhappiness overwhelms them and they mistakenly think that doing such an action will remove their misery.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if these people were happy? If they were happy, they wouldn’t be doing what they are doing. They wouldn’t have a troubled mind, so they wouldn’t be saying or doing actions motivated by that troubled mind. You see, even for our own benefit, it makes much more sense to wish our enemies to be happy.

That doesn’t mean we wish for them to get everything that they want, because lots of people want things that are not good for them. It doesn’t mean if Saddam Hussein wants weapons, we wish him to have more weapons that harm others. That is not compassion. That is stupidity.

Compassion (wanting people to be free from suffering and its causes) and love (wishing them to have love and its causes) do not mean that we necessarily want them to have whatever they want. People can sometimes be incredibly confused and want things that are not good for them or for anybody else. We could look at Saddam Hussein, see the pain in his heart and wish that he be free from that pain. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if he were

free from the pain in his heart that causes his hatred? Wouldn't it be great if he could have a peaceful mind? Then he wouldn't harm anybody else in his confused attempt to be happy. Then he wouldn't create so much destructive karma that will bring himself more pain in the future.

When we think this way repeatedly and work it into our meditations, we discover that compassion is a more suitable response to harm than hatred is. I really see this embodied in my teachers and especially in His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

His Holiness was born in 1935 and in 1950 when he was only fifteen years old, he was enthroned as the leader of Tibet. At that time, the Tibetans were having so many difficulties with the Communist Chinese, and they trusted His Holiness and wanted him to take political leadership of the country. Think about that: remember what you were doing when you were fifteen? How would you have felt having the responsibility of running a country and protecting other people when you were that age? Pretty amazing.

In 1959, when he was 24 years old, there was an uprising against the Communist Chinese and His Holiness had to escape by crossing the Himalayan Mountains in March, when the snow was heavy and the weather was really cold. He went to India and became a refugee. Tibet was on a high plateau and had chilly weather so there were few viruses and bacteria there. In contrast, the Indian plain was hot and full of viruses

and bacteria that cause various illnesses. Here he was, 24 years old and a refugee. In addition, he has to help tens of thousands of other Tibetan refugees, many of whom were ill from the viruses and bacteria in India.

I saw a video of a reporter from the L. A. Times interviewing His Holiness. She said to him, “You have been a refugee since you were 24. You had to leave everything behind and escape quickly and have not been able to return to your country. There has been genocide and ecological devastation in Tibet. The Communist government refuses to negotiate and continually calls you negative names.” She listed many of the hardships His Holiness had experienced and was still experiencing. Then she looked at him and said, “But you are not angry, and you repeatedly tell the Tibetan people not to hate the Communist Chinese for what they did to Tibet. How can you not be angry?”

Imagine someone saying that to Yassar Arafat or any other leader of a displaced people! What would have been the response? He would have taken the microphone and used the opportunity to blame the other side! “Yes, they did this and they did that. It’s unfair, we are unjustly victimised.” That is what any leader of an oppressed people would have done, but not His Holiness.

When the reporter asked, “How come you are not angry?” His Holiness leaned back, smiled and said, “What good does it do to be angry? Anger doesn’t free any of the Tibetan people. It doesn’t stop the harm that

is going on. It would just keep me from sleeping and from being able to digest my food. Holding a grudge would just make me bitter. What positive result could anger bring me?" This reporter looked at His Holiness with her jaw agape, totally blown away.

How could somebody say this with such total sincerity? I have lived in Dharamsala and have heard His Holiness repeatedly say to the Tibetan people, "Do not hate the Communist Chinese for what they did to our country." He has compassion, he is not angry. But he doesn't say that the Communist regime is fine, or that what they did is okay. He doesn't say, "Fine. You occupied my country and killed more than a million people. Come and do it again." No, he speaks out about the oppression in Tibet and directly states what the injustice is. Trying to draw the world's attention to the plight of the Tibetan people, he opposes injustice in a completely non-violent way.

Having compassion for somebody who harms us and letting go of the anger is much better for us and others than holding onto a grudge and seeking revenge. We can still say others' actions are wrong, that the world must pay attention to a detrimental situation, and that improvement and resolution are needed. Compassion doesn't mean we become the world's doormat.

Some people have the wrong idea about compassion, thinking it means being passive. For example, if a woman is being abused by her husband or boyfriend, being compassionate does not mean she thinks,

“Whatever you did was fine. You beat me up yesterday, but I forgive you so you can beat me up again today.” No, that is not compassion. That is stupidity. His beating her is not okay. She can have compassion for him and at the same time she must take active steps to stop further abuse.

There is a clarity that comes with compassion, which enables us to be very assertive when assertiveness is needed. Patience doesn’t mean we roll over and hum a tune, it means we are able to remain calm in a situation when we are confronted with harm or suffering. Instead of our mind being overwhelmed by hurt, anger, fear or self-pity, we remain calm and mentally clear. That gives us the ability to look at the situation and consider, “What is the best way to approach this? How can I act in a way that will bring the most effective solution for everyone involved in this situation?” Compassion and patience may not be the way the world looks at things, but it is fine not to look at things the way most people do, especially if their way causes more suffering.

Let me pause here and see if you have questions or concerns, or topics you want to bring up.



Sometimes painful memories come on very strong. I am not choosing to think about an event from the past, but it just comes into my mind and I

feel like I am stuck there in the midst of the situation again. It is as if it were happening all over again and so many old feelings come up. I don't understand what is happening or how to handle it.

We all have had that happened to us. This is not something we can necessarily banish quickly. When this happens, we have to sit there with it and keep breathing. Remind yourself that the situation is not happening now. Try to press the stop button on the thoughts so that you don't get lost in them. When strong memories come up, our mind is telling us a narrative. It is describing the event in a certain way, looking at it from a particular perspective, "This situation is going to destroy me. It's terrible. I'm worthless. I did the wrong thing and I don't deserve to be happy." That narrative is not true. We usually get trapped in the story, so it is helpful to just focus on your breath. Anchor your attention to your breath and relax. Or you can focus only on the physical sensations. In other words, instead of getting all caught up with the story going on in your mind; simply observe the various sensations in your body and watch them change. Another way is to observe the emotion itself. What does that emotion feel like? Make sure not to get involved in the story that your mind is telling you. That story isn't true. The event is not happening now. You are not a bad person. If you observe the feeling in the mind, the feeling in the body or the breath, then whatever

it is will automatically change. This is the nature of everything that arises; it changes and passes away.

We have a stockpile of painful situations. They are like computer viruses that cause problems and take time to fix. One way that I have found very helpful is when I am not in the situation and not stuck in the middle of my emotions, to consciously remember one of those situations and practise looking at it in a different way. I practise using one of the antidotes the Buddha taught to work with whatever emotions are arising. I talked about some of these antidotes — different ways to see the situation — tonight, so remember them and practise them. Also read Shantideva's *Guide to a Bodhisattva's Way of Life* or my book *Working with Anger*. There are a lot of techniques in there. To show one technique we talked about tonight, here's an example.

Let's say that while I am sitting in meditation, I bring up the memory of a friend who betrayed my trust a few years ago. This was somebody whom I really trusted, and he had turned around and stabbed me in the back, so-to-speak. I never expected this person to act in such a way. I sit there in meditation and know I can easily start telling myself the story again — “he did this and he did that and I was so hurt” — but then I think, “No, that story is not true. That person was in pain. He didn't actually have the intention of hurting me. Although it might have seemed at that moment that he did want to hurt me, actually what was happening was he was overwhelmed

by his own suffering and under the control of his mental afflictions. What he did didn't really have much to do with me. His actions were an expression of his own pain and confusion. If he hadn't been overwhelmed by these emotions, he would not have acted in such a way."

We know that this is the case for us whenever we have betrayed someone else's trust. Or maybe there is someone here who has never betrayed another's trust before? Come on, we all have at one time or another! When we examine our own mind after we have betrayed somebody's trust, we usually feel horrible about it. We think, "How could I ever have said that to this person I love so much?" Then we realise, "I was in pain and was awfully confused. I didn't really understand what I was doing. I thought that by acting in that way my inner suffering would stop, but it didn't! That was the wrong thing to do. I hurt someone I care about and even though apologising is hard on my ego, I want and need to make amends."

When we understand the confused emotions and thought processes inside us that prompted us to betray someone else's trust, we know that when others betrayed our trust it was because they were under the influence of similar emotions and thoughts. They were overwhelmed by their own pain and confusion. It wasn't that they really hated us or really wanted to hurt us, it was that they were so confused they thought that doing or saying whatever they did was going to

relieve their stress and pain. They would have acted in that way towards anyone who crossed their path at that moment because they were stuck in their own story. When we understand this about them, we know they were hurting. We then let go of our own hurt and anger, and allow compassion for them to arise in our mind because we know they were miserable and their behaviour really had nothing to do with us.

To work through some of these situations — especially the ones where our minds have been stuck in a negative emotion for a long time — we need to do this meditation repeatedly. We need to familiarise our mind with a new way of looking at things. We have to retrain our mind and set up new emotional habits. It is going to take some time and effort on our part, but if we put in that time and make that effort, we will definitely experience the result. The law of cause and effect operates, and if we create the cause we will experience the effect. If we don't create the cause, we won't get that effect. When we really practise, it is possible to change. I can say that from personal experience. I am still very far from Buddhahood, but I can say that I am able to deal with many of the painful things in my life much better now than I was years ago. I have been able to let go of a lot of anger simply through repeatedly practising these meditations.

When we start looking repeatedly at previous painful or stressful situations in different ways, it helps the next time we are in a similar situation.

Then, instead of our minds getting stuck in the same old emotional habits, we will be able to call to mind that other way of looking at the situation and practise it. We will remember it because we have familiarised ourselves with that new perspective during meditation.

Here is another example. I was at a retreat that one of my teachers was leading. One nun who attended this retreat loved arranging the flower offerings on the altar. She took such joy in it that she would design beautiful flower offerings to be placed on the shrine near the Buddha's image and near our teacher. But she was unable to stay for the entire retreat and left early. One day after she had left, another person joined me as I was leaving the meditation hall at the end of the day to walk back to my room. She said to me, "Ven. Ingrid left and nobody is taking care of the flowers. It is the nuns' responsibility to take care of the flowers and now all the flowers have wilted and look so ugly and are in disarray. The nuns are being disrespectful to our teacher because they are not taking care of the flowers." She was going on and on about this. Mentally, I was thinking, "I don't remember a rule saying that the nuns have to take care of the flowers. Are you trying to guilt-trip me? Yes, you are guilt-tripping me. But you're not going to succeed. No way! I'm not going to take care of the flowers just because you're saying that!" I got pretty worked up over it. The anger didn't show on the outside, but inside, I was simmering. As

she went on and on with this guilt trip, I got madder and madder.

A little background on this retreat: My teacher didn't let us sleep very much. Sessions lasted late into the night and began early each morning, so we were all sleep-deprived. The conversation with this other retreatant took place as we were walking to our rooms to retire for the night. The problem is when you are angry, you can't go to sleep. Suddenly the thought came to my mind, "Ahh! If I continue being angry, I'm not going to get to sleep and I really cherish my few hours of sleep. So I have got to let go of this anger because I really want to sleep!" Thus I said to myself, "This is just her opinion. There is no reason to get mad at her. Everyone is entitled to his or her opinion, and I don't need to be so reactive when someone's opinion differs from mine. The flowers look okay to me. If they were really bad I would do something, but they look fine to me. I'll check tomorrow and if they look bad, I'll take care of them." Then I just let go and got some sleep that night! Of course, caring about my own sleep wasn't the most compassionate motivation, but at least it enabled me to stop the anger and to prevent any harsh words or actions motivated by anger from occurring.

After practising looking at things in a different way when we are not in the situation, it becomes easier to catch ourselves in the situation and not get angry. Here's a story about a time when another monastic and I had a problem. It was during the same retreat. I had

been talking to another person about a topic and during the break, we asked our teacher about it. After that, this monastic came up to me and said, “Why did you ask that ridiculous question? You already know what he thinks. Just because you don’t agree, why do you need to keep harping on it?” Well, I didn’t like being talked to that way. I was getting mad as the bell rang for us to go back into the meditation hall. I felt misunderstood; I had posed a sincere question to our teacher and my mind was saying, “It wasn’t her business! She wasn’t supposed to be listening to that conversation.” I didn’t know what she was getting riled up about but I was sure getting angry.

Then I thought, “Where am I ever going to go in this world where everybody will understand me? I’ve been misunderstood many times in the past. This is not the first time that somebody has misunderstood me and blamed me for something I didn’t do. It’s not the first time, and it’s not going to be the last time either. This is *samsara* — cyclic existence — and such misunderstandings happen all the time. It is sure to happen again. Somebody else will misunderstand me and criticise me. Someone will accuse me of a wrong motivation when this is not the case. This is just the nature of our life in cyclic existence, so why should I bother getting angry about it? What good is anger going to do for me or anyone else? There is already enough suffering in cyclic existence, so why should I get angry and increase it?” So I said to myself, “Let’s just

chill out, Chodron, and relax because there's nothing worth getting upset about here." Thinking in this way helped me to let go of the anger. What's nice is we are friends and I don't hold what happened against her. Instead, she gave me a good story to tell!

Some past painful events have stuck with me for a long time, but I have found that if I continuously apply the meditations and the antidotes, eventually I have been able to let them go. There is so much peace of mind when we stop holding onto the false stories that our mind has made up.

Here's another story. In the early 1980s, my teacher sent me to work in an Italian Dharma centre. I am an independent woman and was given a position of authority in the Dharma centre. The people under me were macho Italian monks. Do you know what happens when you put macho Italian monks together with an independent American woman who is in a position of authority over them? You have something close to Los Alamos! The monks were not happy campers about the situation and they didn't hesitate to let me know that. Having an uncontrolled mind, I was getting really mad at them in return.

I was in Italy for twenty-one months. One time I wrote to Lama Yeshe, the teacher who sent me there, and asked, "Lama, please, can I leave? These people are making me create so much negative karma!" Lama wrote back and said, "We'll talk about it when I'm there. I'll be there in six months."

Finally, Lama came and gave me permission to leave Italy. I returned to India to do solitary retreat for a few months. I did four meditation sessions a day, and in almost every meditation session I would think of the macho men and get angry. I was just furious at them for everything they had done: they made fun of me, they teased me, they didn't listen to what I said, they interfered with my projects, they did this, they did that. I was upset one meditation session after another, but I just kept applying the antidotes from *Guide to a Bodhisattva's Way of Life* and slowly my mind began to calm down.

At first, I was able to calm myself down in a meditation session. But after taking a break and sitting down for the next session, I would again think about what had happened in Italy and get angry all over again. So I would practise the antidote once more and calm myself down. This experience showed me that if I persevere in applying those antidotes — which usually involved reframing to see and think about the situation in a more realistic way — I will see progress. Gradually, a shift happened and I was able to let go of the anger a little more quickly. The anger wasn't so intense and didn't arise so often. Finally, my mind was able to relax about the whole thing. Years later, when I wrote *Working With Anger* I had to give credit to those Italian men because due to their kindness, I became familiar with these meditations to cultivate patience.

Why are we angry? Mostly, it is because we are

either hurt or afraid. These two emotions usually underlie our anger. What lies behind hurt and fear? Often it is attachment, especially if we are clinging tightly to somebody, something or to an idea we have. Let's say we are attached to a person and want his approval, love, affection and praise. We want him to think and say nice things about us. If he doesn't do that and he says something a little bit off, we are so hurt. We feel betrayed and vulnerable. We don't like to feel hurt or afraid because we feel powerless, and feeling powerless is really uncomfortable. What does the mind do to distract us from those feelings and to restore the illusion of having power? It creates anger. When we are angry, the adrenaline starts pumping and we have a false feeling of power because the body is energised. The anger gives us the feeling, "I have power. I can do something about this situation. I'll fix it!" This is make-believe. Anger won't fix the situation; it only makes it worse. It is as if we were thinking, "I'll be so mad at them that they'll regret what they did and love me." Is that true? When people are mad at us and say nasty things to us, do we love them in return? No! It's just the opposite — we want to stay away from them. Similarly, that's how the other person will react to our anger. It won't make the person feel close to us. It will only push him or her away.

In such a situation, we are craving to hear some kind words or we are clinging to others accepting us, but they are not giving us what we want. If we can

acknowledge that and release the attachment, we will see that we are complete and whole already, regardless of whether the other person likes us or doesn't like us, praises us or blames us, approves of us or disapproves of us. If we feel fine with ourselves, we are not so dependent on what others think, and then we are able to let go of the attachment and stop feeling hurt. When we stopped holding onto the hurt and blaming others for it, there is no more anger.

A lot of hurt feelings come about because we don't feel totally sure of ourselves. Thus, we crave for somebody else's approval or praise so that we can feel good about ourselves. This is what most people do. However, if we learn to evaluate our own actions and motivations, we won't be so dependent on other people telling us if we are good or bad. Are other people's opinions reliable? Are they true? Remember the example I gave at the beginning of the talk about the person who gave a million dollars to build a clinic? Everybody says to him, "You're so good, you're such a wonderful person!" Is that true? He had a crummy motivation. He wasn't generous at all, even though others praised him.

Instead of relying on other people and what they say about us, we need to look at our own actions, reflect on our own speech and look at our own motivations: Did I say those words and do that action with a kind heart? Was I being honest and truthful? Was I trying to manipulate others or pull the wool over their eyes?

Was I being selfish and trying to dominate others? We need to learn to evaluate our motivations and actions honestly. If we see our motivation was self-centred, we acknowledge it and do a purification practice. We calm our mind and then by looking at the situation freshly, we cultivate a new, kinder motivation.

When we are aware of our motivations and able to correct them, it doesn't matter whether somebody praises us or blames us. Why? Because we know ourselves. When we see that we acted with a good motivation — we were kind, honest and did our best in the situation — then even if somebody doesn't like what we did or criticise us, we don't feel bad about it. We know our own internal reality. We did what we could with a positive mental state, given the situation. When we are in touch with ourselves and are more self-accepting, we are able to immediately remedy disturbing emotions instead of just letting them fester inside our minds. The more we are able to look at ourselves honestly and apply the methods the Buddha taught to eradicate disturbing emotions and enhance constructive ones, the less dependent we will be on other people's comments. This gives us a certain kind of freedom; we become less reactive to what others say about us and are more confident.

Once, I was giving a Dharma talk in a Seattle bookstore to an audience of about fifty people when somebody stood up during the Q-and-A session and said, "Your kind of Buddhism is different from my kind

of Buddhism. What you're teaching is all wrong. You said this and that, and that's not right because this is what's true." This person spoke for about ten minutes, really trashing the talk that I had just given. When she was done, I just said, "Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts." I wasn't angry because I knew I had studied, that what I said was correct to the best of my ability, and that I had cultivated a compassionate motivation before giving the talk. If the person had said something that I thought was correct, I would have said, "Hmm. What you're saying makes sense. Maybe I did make an error." I would have gone back and asked my teacher, studied more and checked it out. That wasn't the case though. I listened to the person's criticism and I didn't find it to be accurate, so I just let it go. There was no need to defend myself or put the person down. I knew that I did my best and wasn't offended by her comments. After the talk, some people came up to me and said, "We couldn't believe you were so calm after how this person acted!" Perhaps that was the real teaching of the evening. I think something good came out of it.



Do you think things are progressing or deteriorating on the planet?

It is hard for me to give a global statement because although there are some people whose minds are filled with negative thoughts, there are others whose minds are changing and becoming more tolerant and compassionate. I do have cause for hope. Before the Iraq war, there was a debate in the United Nations (UN) on whether to invade Iraq. Even though the United States of America stepped in and took over the show when other nations did not agree that it was necessary to invade Iraq, this was actually the first time there had been a discussion about starting a war in the UN where all the countries could discuss openly.

More people are becoming aware of the ecological situation and it is encouraging that Al Gore and the UN researchers were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their work in this area. Many people who are not Buddhists come to Buddhist talks and are moved by the teachings on love, compassion and forgiveness. I live in an abbey in a very Christian area with a lot of libertarians, close to where the Aryan nation used to have its headquarters. I teach classes in the local town and people come. They aren't Buddhist classes — we talk about how to reduce stress, how to cultivate love and compassion, and so forth — but everybody knows I am a Buddhist nun. People in the local town attend and are appreciative. I think people are looking for a message of peace. It's impressive to see how well

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is received around the world.



Concluding Meditation

To conclude, let's sit quietly for a few minutes. This is a "digestion meditation", so think about something that we talked about. Recall it in such a way that you can take it with you and continue to think about it and put it into practice in your life. (pause)



Dedication

Let's dedicate the merit that we have created as individuals and as a group. We listened and shared with a positive motivation; we contemplated thoughts of kindness and compassion with a good intention in an attempt to transform our mind.

Let's dedicate this merit and send it out into the universe. Think of it as light at your heart that radiates into the universe. That light is your merit, your virtue and you send it out and share it with all other living beings. Think that as this light touches them, their bodies are healed and their minds become tranquil and loving.

Let's pray and aspire so that through what we have

done together this evening, all living beings may be at peace in their own heart. May all living beings be able to let go of their grudges, hurt and anger. May all living beings be able to actualise their incredible inner human beauty and manifest their Buddha potential. May we be able to make greater and greater contributions to the benefit of each and every living being. May each of us and all other living beings quickly become fully enlightened Buddhas.





Born in 1950, Ven Thubten Chodron grew up near Los Angeles. She graduated with a B.A. in History from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1971. After travelling through Europe, North Africa and Asia for one and a half years, she received a teaching credential and went to the University of Southern California to do postgraduate work in Education while working as a teacher in the Los Angeles City School System.

In 1975, she attended a meditation course given by Ven Lama Yeshe and Ven Zopa Rinpoche, and subsequently went to their monastery in Nepal to continue to study and practise the Buddha's teachings. In 1977, she received the *sramanerika* (novice) ordination, and in 1986, went to Taiwan to take the *bhikshuni* (full) ordination.

She studied and practised Buddhism of the Tibetan tradition for many years in India and Nepal, and directed the spiritual programme at Lama Tzong Khapa Institute in Italy for nearly two years. She studied three years at Dorje Pamo Monastery in France and was a resident teacher at Amitabha Buddhist Centre in Singapore. Ven. Chodron was a co-organiser of *Life as a Western Buddhist Nun*, and took part in the conferences of Western Buddhist teachers with H.H. the Dalai Lama in 1993 and 1994. She currently lives and teaches in Sravash Abbey in Washington and continues to travel worldwide to teach the Dharma. Her books include *Open Heart, Clear Mind* (Snow lion, Ithaca NY), *Buddhism for Beginners* (Snow Lion, NY), *Taming the Monkey Mind* (Graham Brash, Singapore), and *Glimpse of Reality* (with Dr. Alexander Berzin).

Access the Internet for up-to-date information on Ven. Chodron's teachings, dharma activity schedules, publications and more at www.thubtenchodron.org

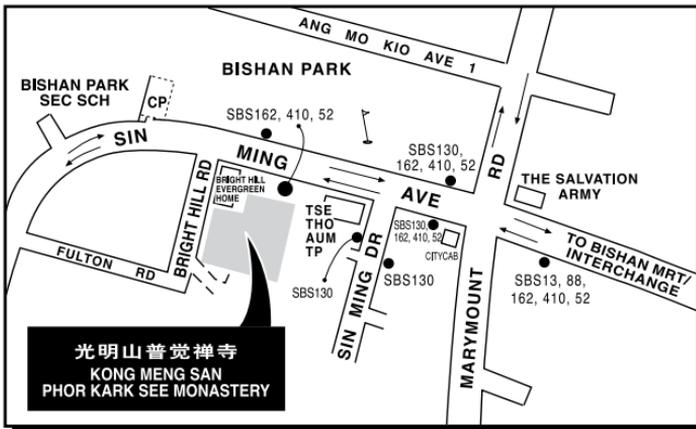
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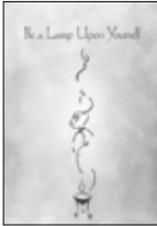
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Be A Lamp Upon Yourself

Compilation

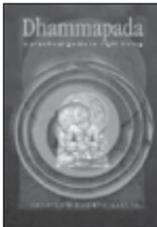
The usefulness of this book is in its concise approach to the basic teachings of the Buddha.



Preparing For Death And Helping The Dying

Ven. Sangye Khadro

This booklet answers a genuine need in today's world: to know more about death and how to help dying people. The discomfort we have towards death is because we think it will be a terrible, painful and depressing experience. However, it doesn't have to be so. Dying can be a time of learning and growth; a time of deepening our love, our awareness of what is important in life, and our faith and commitment to spiritual beliefs and practices.



Dhammapada

Ven. Acharya Buddharakkhita

The Dhammapada, which enshrines the spirit of the Buddhas' teachings, is a book for all times, a book to be cherished and loved. May it bring light to your life!

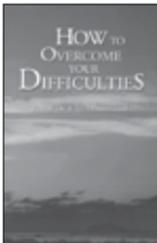
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Working With Anger

Ven. Thubten Chodron

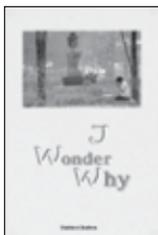
This book describes Buddhist methods for subduing and preventing anger, not by changing what is happening, but by framing it differently.



How to Overcome Your Difficulties

Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda

Are you worried? Are you miserable? If so, you are invited to read this booklet to develop a better understanding of your problems. It is dedicated to you and to those who worry.



I Wonder Why

Ven. Thubten Chodron

This book covers the most fundamental questions and issues that arise in the minds of modern individuals who are new to this tradition of practical spirituality. Written in a clear and engaging language, this book presents the Buddhist approach to the fundamental issues and concerns of daily life.



Settling Back Into The Moment

Joseph Goldstein

This book is a compilation of excerpts that are words of timeless truths, words that are meant for reflection, words that talk straight to your heart.

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Practical Vipassana Meditation Exercises

Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw

Transcribed from a discourse given by the late Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw, this book addressed to lay people describes the subtleties and methods of Vipassana meditation practice in a plain, easy and concise language. Showing us the path to liberation through the way of mindfulness, it is not the kind of book that one reads for reading's sake.

** English & Chinese Editions*



Awakening a Kind Heart

Ven. Sangye Khadro

Everybody wants to be happy and free of problems. The two short teachings in this book explain simply and clearly how we can achieve this happiness by transforming our usual self-cherishing attitude and awakening a kind heart.



We Are Good Children

Xin Lian ** English & Chinese Editions*

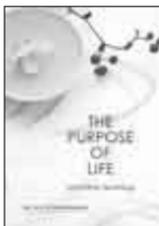
Children should be taught and instilled with the right morals and ethics from young. The objectives of this bilingual book are to introduce, familiarise and inculcate young children the virtues of Buddhism and eastern culture like filial piety, gratitude and compassion. Through this process, we hope children would be imbued with the positive traits of self-reflection and self-correction of non-virtuous behaviour and conduct.



Three Teachings

Ven. Tenzin Palmo

Ven. Tenzin Palmo's Teachings on Retreat, Mahamudra Practice and Mindfulness are a delight to read. Transcribed from talks that she gave in Singapore in May 1999, the teachings are delivered in plain language, seasoned with plenty of audience participation. Each subject is discussed with humour, liveliness and compassion. She has the great gift of showing how the Dharma can be integrated into every aspect of our lives.

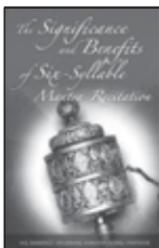


The Purpose of Life

Ven. K Sri Dhammanada

Is there a purpose for life? What is the purpose of life? What, or where or when? Out of space came universe, Came sun, came earth, came life... But as to purpose whose or whence? Why?

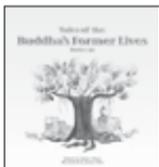
This book gives very clear, practical and direct to the point advice to those who seek to achieve an understanding of their life on earth, and how to lead a noble life amidst the confusion, murkiness, materialism and strong craving that this age heralds.



The Significance and Benefits of Six-Syllable Mantra Recitation

HE Drubwang Konchok Norbu Rinpoche

Are you curious about the origin of the Six-Syllable mantra? Or what the Four-arm Chenrezig means? Read this book for a better understanding. Based on a series of teachings given by His Eminence Drubwang Konchok Norbu Rinpoche of the Drikung Kagyu lineage, this book also explains the benefits and importance of doing the Mani recitation, and the mental state in which the recitation is to be conducted.



Stories 1-50

Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives is a collection of simple stories written along the line of Aesop's Fables. Though meant for readers of all ages, they are especially useful to older children and teenagers, as these stories promote and highlight virtuous conduct and good behaviour, especially those human values that contribute to harmony, pleasure and progress.



Stories 51-100



Transforming Our Daily Activities

Ven. Thubten Chodron

Spiritual practice need not be separated from daily living. Here is a book that teaches you how you can lead a more fulfilling life according to the Buddha's teachings and transform your daily activities into acts of compassion and loving-kindness. You can live and breathe the Dharma even while at work, driving or doing grocery shopping!



A Happy Married Life

A Buddhist Perspective

Ven. K Sri Dhammanada

Is there a purpose for life? What is the purpose of life?

A marriage is a partnership of equality, gentleness, generosity, calm and dedication. Ven. Dr K Sri Dhammananda tells how a good marriage should grow and develop from understanding and true loyalty where the personalities involved are allowed to grow.



3 Refuge & 5 Precepts

三皈五戒

What is the Significance of Taking 3 Refuge & 5 Precepts?

This 40-minute DVD features the very foundations of what it takes to be a Buddhist - Taking Refuge in the Triple Gem and abiding by moral guidelines to sow the seeds of peace and happiness in our everyday life. With coverage of all 3 Buddhist traditions, this is a good introduction for anyone who wishes to become a Buddhist. Complimentary DVD available in 4 languages (English, Mandarin, Hokkien and Cantonese).

DVD



A Rose for your Pocket

为你别上一朵红玫瑰

Thich Nhat Hanh

All of us are showered with tender love for many years, and without even knowing it, we are quite happy with that. Only when it has vanished do we awaken with a start. This book, dedicated to all mothers, past, present and future, expresses just how dear and precious our own parents are. It tells us truly how our parents are the most wonderful treasures that we are given.

多年以来，我们一直徜徉在温暖的母爱的海洋中，甚至还身在福中不知福，把一切视为是理所当然的。直到瞬间失去了母亲后，我们才恍然醒悟，悔不当初。只可惜，这一切都已经太迟了。此书献给所有过去，现在与未来的母亲们，以告诉我们的父母是如何的可敬与珍贵。它真实地告诉我们，父母是我们被给予最美好的宝藏。



开阔心·清净心

Open Heart, Clear Mind

土登却准法师 著 ◎ 涂炳忠 译

作者以浅白易懂的语言，表达出对佛法的清晰理解，能使一般人，尤其是对佛教还不熟悉的人，了解佛法，运用佛法，并从中获益。



心灵曙光

Basic Buddhism for Beginners

土登却准法师 著 ◎ 涂炳忠 译

在修学佛法的过程中，我们难免会遇到一些困难与疑问。作者针对一般人的疑问提出了独到的见解，仿佛黎明中的一道曙光，射入读者的心灵，扫除内心的困惑，带来智慧的光芒，让有心于修学佛法的朋友，能进一步了解并实践佛陀的教诲。



七月是不是鬼节？

Is The 7th Lunar Month The Ghosts' Season?

七月真的是鬼门关大开、祭拜“好兄弟”的节日吗？

本书告诉您事情的真相……

* English & Chinese Editions



告别嗔怒·步向安宁

Working with Anger

土登却准法师 著 ◎ 涂炳忠 译

佛陀是一位心灵的医疗师，他传授了许多处理情绪与烦恼的实用方法，其中一些对治嗔恚的方法，非常适合运用在日常生活中。只要我们能够掌握这些方法，生活就不再烦恼！



怎样克服你的困难

How to Overcome Your Difficulties

达摩庵陀法师 著

您忧愁苦恼吗？如果您有这种感觉，就请您阅读这本小册子。它能让您对自己的问题有更深入的了解。这本小册子就是献给您和被忧愁所笼罩的人。



生死两相安

Preparing for Death and Helping The Dying

桑耶卡卓法师 著

死亡并非一切的终结，而是进入另一世的门槛。
勇于面对死亡，才会勇于活在当下。
只有接受死亡，才能接受人生中的悲欢离合。
希望这本小册子，能让您对死亡有初步的了解，
并对如何协助临终者有基础的认识。



点亮心灯 (汇编)

Be A Lamp Upon Yourself

佛法如灯，照亮心灵的暗室。
智慧如海，冲破心灵的桎梏。

如果有人邀请您走一趟般若之旅，
点一盏心灵之灯，您是否愿意？



佛说父母恩重难报经

Filial Piety Sutra

慈鸦尚还哺，羔羊犹跪足，若不尽孝道，何以分人畜？做个孝顺的儿女，
当读《佛说父母恩重难报经》，以报亲恩。

* English & Chinese Editions



地藏菩萨本愿经 白话解释 胡维铨 演说

众生度尽·方证菩提·地狱不空·誓不成佛

在地藏经里，释迦牟尼佛宣说地藏菩萨的深重誓愿——累劫勤苦，分身无数，百千方便，利益救拔教化罪苦众生。



菩萨的故事 / 莲池大师的故事 简体漫画版

本书用最通俗的语言，通过菩萨与莲池大师的故事，深入浅出的把佛法告诉大家。观音菩萨为了救度众生，示现蛤蜊和卖鱼女，不但演绎了生动感人的美丽故事，而且教化了成千上万的人。莲池大师被公认为净宗八祖，可是知道大师生平事迹的人不多，本书可以让你了解，大师如何体悟无常，发心出家，如何守孝至深，四处求法，及其随缘教化感化世人……

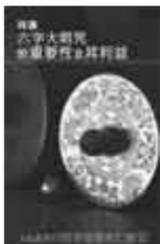


唤醒一颗善良的心

Awakening A Kind Heart

桑耶卡卓法师

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持诵六字大明咒 的重要性及其利益

The Significance and Benefits of
Six-Syllable Mantra Recitation

竹旺贡觉诺布仁波切 著

六字大明咒的起源何在？四臂观音有什么含义？这本小册子收录了直贡噶举派的大成就者竹旺贡觉诺布仁波切的开示，当中解释了持诵六字大明咒的利益及其重要性，与在念诵时应该生起的正确心态。

新加坡第一所提供学位课程、培养学修并重优质僧侣的佛学院，已在光明山普觉禅寺成立了。学院任重道远，开支庞大，欢迎十方信众的发心供养。如果您想和大家分享这种功德无上法布施的喜悦，敬请以最现代化的方式，填妥下列“财路”捐款表格，寄回光明山普觉禅寺。谢谢。

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1. One's light karmic misgivings will dissolve, while heavy ones lighten.
2. One will be protected by devas, and be unharmed by natural and man-made disasters.
3. One will always be free from the suffering of hatred and vengeance.
4. One will be unharmed by yaksas, evil spirits and wild beasts.
5. One's mind will be at peace, free from harm and nightmares.
6. One's complexion will be radiant.
7. One will be full of auspicious energy.
8. One who practises the Dharma wholeheartedly will have adequate living necessities.
9. One's family will be harmonious and be blessed with fortune and wisdom.
10. One who practises what one preaches will be respected and loved by all.
11. One who is dull-minded will gain wisdom.
12. One who is ill will gain health.
13. One who is poor will gain wealth.
14. One will be free of being reborn in the negative realms.
15. One will be able to help others grow in wisdom and gain great merit in doing so.
16. One will always be able to learn the Dharma, till one's wisdom and spiritual penetrations are fully grown and one becomes a Buddha.

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