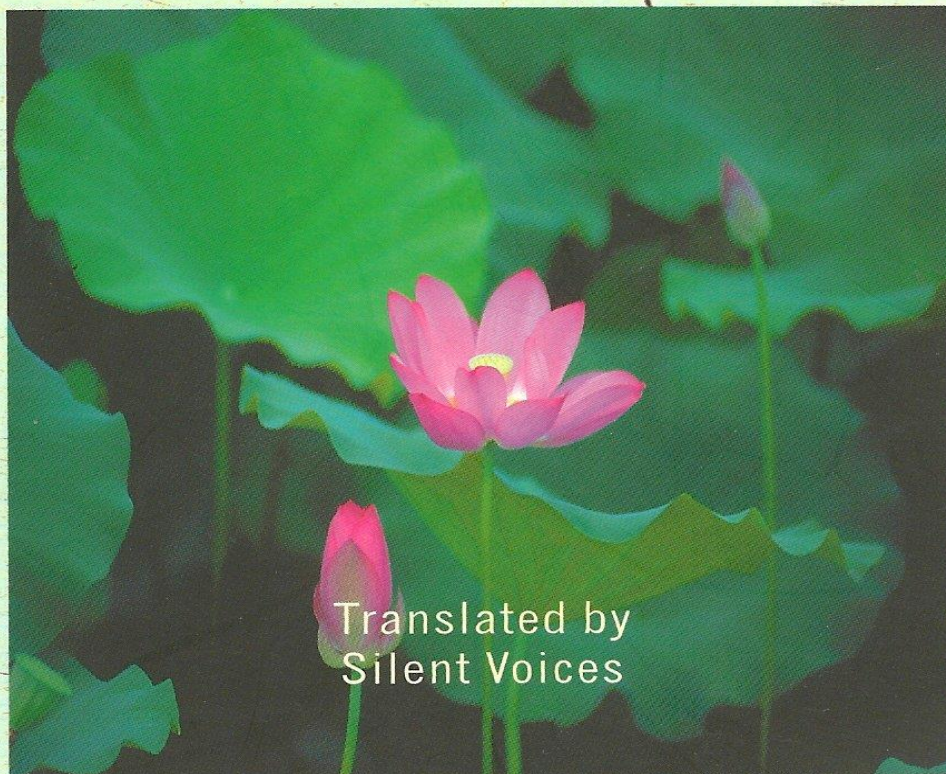


**The Collected  
Works of  
Venerable Master  
Chin Kung**



Translated by  
Silent Voices

## **Preface by Most Venerable Thich Nhu Hue**

The aim of Buddhist doctrine merely point out two fields: suffering and the ending of the suffering. The path leading to the ending of suffering to attain the enlightenment, the practitioner must enter the door “ three ways of learning” that is called: hearing, thinking and practicing”, if the practitioner apply extremely this way, they will get the target perfection in the process to come back of the spiritual homeland. Hearing, means listening the lecture, reading books, discussing with friends to understand exactly and deeply about the Buddha’s teaching. Thinking means consider deeply about what you have heard, entering the teaching by your mind, not by your mouth and ear. If you think of it you can penetrate that the benefit of that teaching than like treatment, to get high position. Practicing: apply that teachings into your daily life after you have chosen them carefully which are suitable with you. In fact, due to wrong seeing, sow the wrong seeds, reap the bad fruit. That means if you create the evil causes, the unhappy effects will come back to you. People have learned, thinking and practicing which will help them to change their attitudes, to untie the wrong concept, and then they replace the right view, peace, happiness and enlightenment.

“ The Collected Works Of Venerable Master Chin Kung” is a book contains many good volumes like: Buddhism as an Education, to understand Buddhism, the Immutability of Cause and Effect...” this book will help you to increase your knowledge, faith and optimistic on the way leading to the enlightenment.

Venerable Master Chin Kung, the preacher of all lectures of this book, at moment, he is a famous Buddhist Monk in the world which he has brought Buddhism to the west. His Teachings is practical and close with Buddhist followers.

Venerable Thich Nguyen Tang is a translator, and also a deputy-Secretary of Unified Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation in Australia and New Zealand,

although he is busy with the tasks of his own monastery and congregation, he however still spend much time to researches and translates the Buddhist doctrines to share with others.

I have a few words to praise the virtue and merit of Venerable Master Chin Kung and Venerable Thich Nguyen Tang and I am happy to introduce this book to all readers.

Adelaide,           The           Winter           Retreat,           May           2004  
Rector,           Most           Venerable           Thich           Nhu           Hue  
Unified Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation in Australia and New Zealand

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### **Translator's Notes**

‘The gift of truth excels all others gift’ so goes the proverb of the Buddhist Patriarchs. This good advice is for their followers to guide them on the Buddhist path in as they perform their vows that lead to the spiritual source. Offering the Truth, means simply sharing and kindly pointing out to others the way of recognising the Truth of the Lord Buddha- so they too may aim to return to the shore. It reminds us to avoid wrong actions and avoid the contribution of misery and suffering to others sentient beings as well as our own. Once people learn the fundamentals of Buddhism, their life may be changed for the better. They may become more aware and mindful in life, and likely, they will step on the path leading to liberation and enlightenment.

Venerable Master Chin Kung said that offering Truth seems to be simple, but it is not exactly that easy. Venerable Master Chin Kung has therefore provided his profound efforts in the establishments the "Amitabha Publication Association" in Taiwan to publish and distribute freely Sutras and books on Buddhism to all Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike across the globe. He

prints Buddhist Sutra in Chinese, and languages such as in English, French and Vietnamese. All this effort is to enable all people to feel comfortable within their own cultural languages, settings and at ease in being able to read and realize the Buddhist Truth and ultimately discover the end of suffering.

According to Venerable Master Chin Kung, a Buddhist Sutra should be printed with goodness and be beautiful in both content and presentation. It needs to be attractive to readers of today. He has had wonderful success in the application of this strategy in spreading Dharma texts to millions of reader word wide over the last two decades.

During mid 2003 for instance, Quang Duc Monastery here in Australia (the monastery in which I live) received some 300 boxes of Buddhist books from his Publication House in Taiwan! What a treasure trove were in those boxes. I was astounded with the quality and interesting texts such as the Chien-Long Buddhist Tipitaka, which contains Sutras, Law and Commentaries. Thanks to this, I picked out one book with the title “The Collected Works of Venerable Master Chin Kung” and started to translate this book into Vietnamese.

Therefore, from translating and publishing this book, I sincerely want to dedicate it to Venerable Master Chin Kung particularly on the occasion of his visit to our Quang Duc Monastery to give a Dharma talk on the third week of October 2004.

The Quang Duc Monastery Abbot, the Very Venerable Thich Tam Phuong, myself and special local Buddhist followers conveyed our best regards and appreciation regarding his assistance and extended our warmest welcome to this great Master upon his arrival here in Melbourne in 2004 and for his effort in providing access for so many to Pure Land Buddhism.

This book is a great combination of the efforts of many contributors towards completion, I am most grateful to the labor of those who made it all possible. I

wish to convey my utter most sincere thanks to Most Venerable Thich Nhu Hue; The Rector of Unified Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation in Australia and New Zealand- who wrote the Preface for this book. My deepest gratitude to The Very Venerable Thich Tam Phuong, who motivates and energizes me throughout my career. Last but not least, to so many respected Buddhist members such as Venerable Thich Pho Huan (Australia), Venerable Nun Thich Nu Nhat Nhan (USA), Venerable Nun Thich Nu Nhu Nguyet (Taiwan), Chris Dunk, Gia Khanh, Thien Khanh, Cao Than, Nguyen Nhat Minh, Quang Nhu, Nhi Tuong, Hai Hanh, Tam Kien Chanh, Phu Duc, Tan Nhut, Thanh Phi, Thanh Tam and Tam Lac.

Those in which have greatly assisted me towards the final draft of this publication. I also am indebted to Tue Duyen who read and recorded this book onto cassette and CD Rom to provide text to those with sight problems, the disabled and aged or for those with no time to read enabling them to listen to the text. Finally, I would like to thank all disciples who made donations enabling me to publish this book and provide it to all as a free distribution.

May this booklet help readers and listeners to develop their faith in practicing the recitation the Buddha's name, realise their Bodhi-Mind (Bodhicitta - Aspiration for Enlightenment) and overall make efforts in practicing Buddhism in order to attain liberation and ultimately become free from suffering.

May Pure Land Buddhism widely propagate throughout this world and bring benefits to all Sentient Beings.

Nam Mo Amitabha

<b>Ven.</b>	<b>Thích</b>	<b>Nguyen</b>	<b>Tặng</b>	
<i>Summer</i>	<i>Retreat,</i>	<i>Era:</i>	<i>2548</i>	<i>(2004)</i>
<i>Quang Duc Buddhist Monastery.</i>				





## Volume 1

# **Buddhism as an education**

## Chapter 1:

### The Cause of Our Chaotic World

Today's societies in Taiwan and elsewhere in the world are rather abnormal, a phenomenon that has not been witnessed before either in the West or the East. Some Westerners have predicted that the end of the world will occur in 1999 and that Christ will return to earth for Judgement Day. Easterners have also predicted impending disasters that are similar to those predictions in the West, the only difference being the time frame, which is some twenty years later. Some of these are ancient prophecies, which we should not place too much importance on. However, if we view our environment objectively, we will realize that this world is really in danger.

Environmental pollution has become a serious problem and now humankind has finally begun to understand the need for protecting our environment. However, the problem of mental or spiritual pollution is many times more serious than that of the environment. This is the source of worldly ills that not many people realize. The Chinese have a saying, "Education is most essential to establish a nation, train its leaders and its people." For centuries, the Chinese have always believed in the primacy of education, which is considered the foundation for a peaceful and prosperous society. It provides the solution to a myriad of social ills and leads the way to changing one's suffering into happiness. Education has a strong impact on the nation and its people. Moreover, elementary school is the foundation, the basic building block in an educational system.

## Chapter 2:

### Buddhism as an Education

Buddhism officially came to China in 67 AD. The Emperor had sent special envoys to India to invite Buddhist monks to come to China to teach Buddhism, which in that period, was regarded as an educational system, and not as a religion. Regretfully, about two hundred years ago, the practice of Buddhism had taken on a more religious facade. Therefore, the purpose of this talk is to correct this misunderstanding, by leading us back to the original form of Buddhism as taught by Buddha Shakyamuni.

#### **The Goal of the Buddha's Teaching**

Buddhism is Buddha Shakyamuni's educational system, which is similar to that of Confucius for both presented similar viewpoints and methods. The goal of Buddhist education is to attain wisdom. In Sanskrit, the language of ancient India, the Buddhist wisdom was called "Anuttara-samyak-sambhodi" meaning the perfect ultimate wisdom. The Buddha taught us that the main objective of our practice or cultivation was to achieve this ultimate wisdom. He further taught us that everyone has the potential to realize this state of ultimate wisdom, as it is an intrinsic part of our nature, not something one obtains externally. However, most of us have become confused through general misconceptions and therefore, are not able to realize this potential. Therefore, if we break through this confusion, we will realize this intrinsic part of our nature. Thus, Buddhism is an educational system aimed at regaining our own intrinsic nature. It also teaches absolute equality which stemmed from Buddha's recognition that all sentient beings possess this innate wisdom and nature. Therefore, there is no inherent difference among beings. Everyone is different now because we have lost our true nature and have become confused. The degree of wisdom exhibited by individuals depends on the degree of delusion and has nothing to do with the true nature of the individual. The



Buddha's teaching helps us to realize that innate, perfect, ultimate wisdom. With wisdom, we can then solve all our problems and turn suffering into happiness. Due to our lack of wisdom, we perceive, view and behave foolishly, and thus suffer the consequences evoked by our incorrect actions. If we have wisdom, our thoughts, viewpoints and behavior will be correct; how then can we suffer when there are no ill consequences to suffer from? Of course, we will be happy. From here, we can see that suffering is caused by delusion and the source of happiness is our own realization of wisdom.

## The Core of the Buddha's Teaching

The Buddha's teaching contains three major points: discipline, meditation and wisdom. Wisdom is the goal and deep meditation or concentration is the crucial process toward achieving wisdom. Discipline through observing the precepts, is the method that helps one to achieve deep meditation; wisdom will then be realized naturally. Buddha's entire teachings as conveyed in the sutras never really depart from these three points. Buddhism encompasses the entire collection of works by Buddha Shakyamuni and is called the Tripitaka. This can be classified into three categories: sutra, vinaya (precepts or rules), and sastra (commentaries) which emphasize meditation, discipline, and wisdom respectively.

## The Buddhist Educational Organization in China

Buddhist education is based on filial piety, as is the Chinese culture. Prior to the introduction of Buddhism to China, filial piety was the pillar of society and was supported by the wise men of ancient China. When Buddhist monks from India came to China and started to discuss Buddhism with government officials, it was immediately apparent to everyone that Buddhism shared numerous similarities with the indigenous Confucian traditions. Consequently, the government embraced them and requested that the monks stay in China permanently.

The first two monks, who came to China, Moton and Chufarlan, were received by the "Hong-Lu-Si" which is equivalent to our present Foreign Ministry or State Department. "Si" was designated as a ministry of the government. The Chief of Hong-Lu-Si is equivalent to a foreign minister or Secretary of State. However, Hong-Lu-Si could only receive foreign guests temporarily. In order to allow them to stay permanently, the Emperor added another ministry, "Bai-Ma-Si," to take charge of Buddhist education. Originally, the "Si" had nothing to do with a temple, but merely denoted a ministry of the imperial court, now it denotes a temple in contemporary Chinese. So, there were two ministries in charge of education. The "Li-Bu," managed by the Prime Minister, was in charge of the traditional Confucian educational system. This organization served the same function until the early 1900's. As the Emperor had given enormous support to the "Bai-Ma-Si," Buddhist education rapidly spread throughout China. In many instances, it had even far exceeded the efforts to educate people than the traditional education system of "Li-Bu." Consequently, there may not have been a Confucian or Manfucian school in every village, but there was a "Si" everywhere. Again, the Buddhist "Si", or temple, used to be an educational institution and did not perform religious ceremonies at all, unlike what often takes place in contemporary temples nowadays.

Another important mission for the original "Si" was sutra translation. The scale of the translation effort is hard to imagine today. During the seventh century, the famous monk Xuan-Tsuang had supervised six hundred scholars in sutra translation. Prior to this, a monk named Kumaraja had a translation team of about four hundred scholars. Therefore, the "Si" was a large governmental organization. Unfortunately, it was completely transformed into a place to deal with superstition and spirits around two hundred years ago. Its educational characteristics totally disappeared, which was truly regretful.

## The Four Current Types of Buddhism

Today, there are four types of Buddhism being practiced. First, there is the religious Buddhism, which can be witnessed in temples throughout Taiwan. However, this does not represent the real Buddhism. Second, there is the academic Buddhism being taught in many universities today, where we see Buddhism being treated purely as philosophy, an academic pursuit, especially in Japan. This is not exactly Buddha's education either. Third, and the most unfortunate of all, is the total degeneration of Buddhism into a cult. This third type of Buddhism is much more damaging to the public than the first two types. Finally, there is the traditional Buddhism, the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni in its true essence, which is very rare in our day and age.

## Chapter 3:

### The Author's Own Experience with Buddhism

When I was a young student in Nanjing, I did not believe in any religion. I went to church with some classmates to learn about Christianity. Although I tried to understand it, I could not find a way to accept it. My favorite religion at that time was Islam because its emphasis was on moral principles and ethics, and I thought that this was rare among religions. When I encountered Buddhism back then, the monks were not very convincing. Therefore, I could not accept Buddhism either and it was the one I resisted the most. I was too young at that time and had not met a true practitioner.

After I arrived in Taiwan, I heard of Professor Dong-Mei Fang, who was then a famous philosopher and a professor at the National Taiwan University. Having become an admirer of his, I wrote him a letter asking about taking a class from him at the university. Professor Fang was only in his forties at that time. He invited me to his house and told me, "Nowadays in school, professors do not act like professors, and students do not act like students either. If you come to the university and expect to learn something, you will be sorely disappointed." When I heard this, I was pretty upset since he had basically

poured cold water over my plans. Finally, he told me: "Well, why don't you come to my house every Sunday, and I will give you personal instruction for two hours." I could not believe that he was so compassionate towards me. I learned about philosophies at Professor Fang's small table in his little living room, one on one. This was extremely precious to me. He introduced the philosophies of the West, China, India and finally Buddhism. He taught me that Buddhism is the pinnacle of the world's philosophy and that it provides the greatest enjoyment for humanity. What he told me was fascinating and soon I realized that Buddhism contained something magnificent. I started to visit the temples in Taipei. However, the monks I met in those temples just could not clearly explain Buddhism to an intellectual skeptic like me. However, the monks are much better in teaching Buddhism today. Then I set my first sight on Shan-Dao-Si, which was a large temple in Taipei with a vast collection of sutras. During that period of time, the wide publication and circulation of Buddhist books was very rare. The monks at Shan-Dao-Si were extremely kind to me as they allowed me to borrow many of the precious and rare sutras. This was a great help to me. Soon after I started to learn Buddhism seriously, I was fortunate to meet Master Zhang-Jia. He was a well-accomplished Esoteric practitioner who taught and guided me in my study and practice. Just like Mr. Fang, he taught me two hours every week for three years until he passed away. I then went to Taizhong to follow Mr. Bing-Nan Lee and started studying and practicing with him.

Buddhism is a special kind of knowledge; it is not a religion. In order to derive true benefit from it, we have to understand it's true nature. I have the utmost respect for Buddhism and I believe Buddha Shakyamuni to be the foremost educator in the history of the world. He was just like Confucius in that he taught everyone tirelessly and without discrimination.

## Chapter 4:

# The Methodology and Symbolism of the Buddhist Educational System

## The Continuing Education System for Teachers

The continuing education system for teachers was first established by Buddha Shakyamuni. Many of his students were well accomplished under his instruction. Every year, these students were assigned to teach at different places for nine months. In India, the rainy season runs from mid-April to mid-July. Since it was inconvenient to travel and teach during those three months, all the students would come back to meet with the Buddha to receive additional teachings and to learn from each other in class discussions. This was called the summer retreat and it parallels what is currently known as continuing education for teachers. The modern continuing educational system is necessitated by the advancement in technology. However, twenty-five hundred years ago, Buddha had already adopted this idea in bringing his students back for additional teachings.

## The Artful Buddhist Teaching

Buddhist teaching is full of artistic expressions. It was originally an education, which combined what was equivalent to today's museum and school system. Therefore, the "Si" combined the traditional school, library and museum. In ancient China, the traditional school system was not universal. Most students went to a "Si" to study because it usually had a complete collection of books, similar to today's library. The collections included not only sutras, but also almost every kind of publication. The monks were familiar with Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and ancient Chinese texts. They were capable of answering questions and were well versed on various subjects. Consequently, Buddhist institutions began to take over the educational mission for China.



Typical Buddhist buildings are expressions of art, which are called "Expressions of Buddhism." However, Buddha and Bodhisattva statues do not represent polytheism, the worship of more than one god. Each statue serves to inspire wisdom and awakening in each of us. They also represent certain aspects of Buddhism, which remind practitioners of the particular topic of teaching. For example, Guan Yin Bodhisattva, the most popular Bodhisattva in China, represents Infinite Compassion. When we see this statue, it reminds us to apply compassion when dealing with the world, its people and surroundings. However, people nowadays worship Guan Yin Bodhisattva as a god and pray for the relief of suffering and to eliminate obstacles. This is a superstitious view and misconception because people forget the fact that the statues are expressions of concepts in Buddhism.

Buddhist architecture is also an artistic expression, with the temple's main cultivation hall being similar to a large meeting or teaching hall. From the exterior, it appears to have two stories, but there is only one story inside. The external two stories represent "absolute truth" or the true reality of life and the universe, and "relative truth" or worldly views still clouded with delusion. The interior single story illustrates that both are the same truth. To the deluded, the two appear distinct and different; however, to the enlightened, they are one and the same.

In the center of the main cultivation hall, there are three statues, one Buddha and two Bodhisattvas. Buddha represents the true nature of the universe and human life, which is called "Buddha nature" or true mind. "Buddha" is translated from Sanskrit, and means someone who is totally enlightened. The Buddha statue represents our original enlightenment and the Bodhisattvas statues represent the application of our original enlightened mind. All the representations and applications are infinite and can be classified into two categories: wisdom and practice. For example, the Pure Land School pays respect to the Buddha and two Bodhisattvas of the Western Paradise. Amitabha Buddha (Infinite Life and Infinite Light) represents the infinite

enlightenment that is an intrinsic part of our nature. Bodhisattvas Guan Yin (Avalokiteshvara) and Da Shi Zhi (Great Strength or Mahasthamaprapta) respectively portray compassion with kindness and great wisdom. We should be compassionate and kind toward all beings. Our thoughts, views and behavior should be rational rather than emotional, for emotional behavior spells trouble. Therefore, we should not treat the Buddha and Bodhisattvas as gods. But will they help us? Yes, they will by providing us with the knowledge of how to protect ourselves from delusion, thereby obtaining release from suffering. Once we have learned the background of the artistic components in Buddhist architecture, music and statues, we will gain an enriched experience when paying a visit to a traditional Buddhist temple.

However, nowadays many people do not understand the meaning and teachings of Buddhism. They mistake the multi-representations of Bodhisattvas as a sign of polytheism. What people fail to understand is the fact that the statues in Buddhism are teaching aids and not statues of gods. All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas represent our nature and cultivation of virtue. We have infinite capabilities within our true nature that cannot be expressed by just one single term. Therefore, we have multiple representations; for instance, a capable person today may have many titles on his/her business cards to show his/her positions and accomplishments. The Buddha and Bodhisattvas are actually representations of the nature within ourselves: Buddha, as in our true nature of mind, and the Bodhisattvas, in our virtue of cultivation. We all possess these qualities. Not until we come to realize the meaning of Buddhist symbolism, will we appreciate the sophistication and completeness of its education.

Typical "Si" buildings are rare today. The first hall of a "Si" is the hall of Heavenly Guardians, also known as Dharma Protectors. Situated in the center of the hall, facing the front door, is Mi Le Pu Sa (Maitreya Bodhisattva) who is represented by the image of the historical monk Bu-Dai. Mi Le Pu Sa has a big smile that conveys the idea that in order to truly learn Buddhism, one should

learn to be cheerful and courteous to all. He also has a huge belly that represents fairness, flexibility, impartiality, patience and tolerance.

Standing beside Mi Le Pu Sa are the four Heavenly Guardians or Dharma Protectors. They are symbolic guardians of the practitioners of the Buddhist way. Whom do they protect? They protect us by reminding us to educate ourselves and to safeguard the proper knowledge, which we should learn. Each guardian portrays a different aspect of thought or action.

The Eastern Dharma Protector (holding a lute) symbolizes responsibility and safeguards the territory, which means that all of us are responsible for ourselves, our family, society and the country as a whole. If each of us performs our duties well, fulfilling our obligations, we support each other and ourselves as well. The Southern Dharma Protector (holding a sword) symbolizes progress and teaches us diligence. He emphasizes the importance of constantly cultivating and advancing our virtue, wisdom and knowledge, and to improve performance in ourselves and our duties. This is similar to Confucian ideas of daily self-improvement.

The Western Dharma Protector (holding a dragon or snake) symbolizes comprehensive vision and knowledge gained through exposure to the world. He represents the need to open our eyes to observe nature and man, to refine what we see and learn, and to distinguish good from ill. The Northern Dharma Protector (holding an umbrella) symbolizes comprehensive study and learning. Both teach ways of practice and how to achieve the goals in responsibility fulfillment and self-improvement. As the ancient Chinese have said: "To read ten thousand books and to travel ten-thousand miles." We read to gain more knowledge and travel to observe more effectively. We will then be able to improve ourselves and to perform our duties most effectively.

Today, people visit the Hall of Dharma Protectors to burn incense, prostrate and offer flowers and fruit praying for protection and safety. This is

superstition. All the facilities, images of Buddha and Bodhisattvas and any offerings made are teaching tools designed to inspire our mind and wisdom. They also serve to remind us of the importance of being enlightened instead of deluded, virtuous instead of deviated, pure instead of polluted. These are the three principles of Buddhist teaching and practice

## Methods of Practicing Buddhism

The ways in practicing Buddhism are numerous, about eighty-four thousand. Each path is different from the others but ultimately leads to the same goals: enlightenment, proper thoughts and viewpoints, and purity. As such, all paths are equal without one being superior to the other. People have different abilities and levels of accomplishment. Furthermore, they are from different environments and should choose a path most suited to them. We can choose any one of the three goals to concentrate our practice on. When we achieve any one of them, the other two will come naturally.

There are ten schools of practice in Chinese Buddhism. Zen stresses the pursuit of the perfect clear mind or enlightenment. The Pure Land and Tibetan Buddhism or Vajrayana school stress obtaining the pure mind. Other schools concentrate their practice on proper thoughts and viewpoints. Regardless of which method or school one chooses, they all lead to the same outcome. In other words, once we become expert in one method, we will become an expert in all methods.

The purity of the world comes from an individual's inner purity. With a pure mind, a mind without discrimination or attachment, a higher level of wisdom arises in which the world around us naturally comes into harmony. By reciting the Buddha's name, meditating, reciting sutras or mantras, and practicing in accordance with Buddha's teaching, one will attain enlightenment, proper thoughts and viewpoints, and purity of mind thus becoming void of all deluded thoughts.

On the other hand, one is totally on the wrong path if one chants Buddha's name in the hope of gaining a promotion or wealth. That is religion and superstition, and it goes against the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha.

### How Buddhist Terminology Illustrate that Buddhism is an Education

Buddhism is the teaching of Buddha Shakyamuni as he was its founder. We call Him the "Original teacher," just like the Chinese call Confucius the "Greatest sage and teacher." The relationship between Buddha and ourselves is a teacher-student relationship, which is not religious in nature. In religion, there is not a teacher-student relationship but that of father-son or master-servant.

About twenty years ago I gave a series of lectures in Fu-Ren Catholic University and taught in the Thomas Monastery for one semester. I told my students, who were mainly priests and nuns, to take refuge in the Buddha and to learn Buddhism well. There is absolutely no conflict between Buddhism and religion, for one is teacher-student and the other father-son. If the priests and nuns were to practice Buddhism and in turn abandon their own religion, I believe that even Buddha would not accept them, for it is against human ethics to discard the parent for the teacher. Therefore, religious followers will benefit if they practice Buddhism. As we practice, we will attain the true wisdom to know exactly what Heaven is like and will be able to decide when and how we want to go there. Thus, Buddhism is a way of teaching as it teaches us how to regain our true wisdom.

When a monk is called "He-Shang," he is equivalent to the principal in today's school, for he is the director of educational strategies. All other faculty members are teachers who execute the principal's educational strategies and act as role models for the students' behavior and speech. My late teacher, Professor Fang constantly assured me that Buddhism is an education. Later in my studies of the sutras, I reaffirmed his statement that Buddhism is the



pinnacle of the world's wisdom. It provides the greatest enjoyment for humankind. I have experienced the unsurpassable joy of being free from afflictions, delusions and wandering thoughts. My body and mind are clean and pure, totally at ease. I am the happiest person in the world. Therefore, I feel indebted to Professor Fang, for without him, I would not have learned Buddhism nor would I have such complete happiness derived from practicing Buddha's teaching.

## Chapter Five:

### The Integration of Confucianism and Buddhism

Buddhism successfully merged into Chinese culture; they became inseparable. The basic concept that they share is to give up one's own interest for the sake of others. Confucianism and Buddhism advocate the enhancement and glorification of filial piety, the respect and devotion of an individual for their parents and teachers. Filial piety is a major element in accomplishing world peace.

What is education? It is the meaning and the value of human life, the relationships between human beings as well as those between humans and the universe. Confucian teaching encompasses three main points. First, it is important to understand the relationship between humans, once this is understood we will learn to love people. Second, it is important to understand the relationship between humans and heaven, once this is understood we will learn to respect heavenly beings and spirits. Third, it is important to understand the relationship between humans and the environment, once this is understood we will learn to take care of the environment and to appreciate every single thing around us. There are four studies within Confucian teachings: virtue, speech, skills for earning a living and the arts. The teaching

of virtue is the core of Confucianism; it is absolutely crucial, for without morality and proper conduct we become selfish and concerned only with ourselves at the expense of society. Such behavior can result in world chaos. Today, our education has lost that emphasis. Schools only teach skills that are superficial and not the root of education. When the root is rotten, it shakes the foundation of society and causes the chaos that we are experiencing today. Elementary schools are like the root of education: junior highs, high schools, and colleges are the flowers and leaves. Teachers can start teaching filial piety to our children as early as possible.

By looking at the way Chinese characters were created, we cannot but admire our ancestor's high level of wisdom. We thank them for having given us something that is so valuable and exquisite. The Chinese character "piety" embraces the spirit of Buddhism and the foundation of education as it is a combination of the characters for "old" and "son." Nowadays, people talk about the generation gap between parents and children, which is something traditional families did not have. In the Chinese tradition, not only are father and son one unit; grandfathers and grandsons, etc. are all part of the same continuum. This is a unique concept. Westerners often ask why Chinese people pay respect to ancestors since we barely know them. The remembrance of our ancestors is the foundation of Confucianism and Buddhism, which is the source of harmony in society and peace in the world.

Today everyone longs for world peace, but we need to start from the foundation of filial piety to obtain it. Buddhism emphasizes unconditional compassion for all sentient beings in the universe and beyond; in the past, present and future. The continuum of time and space is inseparable from oneself, for We Are All One Entity. One does not find this extensive concept in religion. "Thus Come One", one of the ten names for Buddha, stands for an enlightened being, which is our basic nature, and also the essence of the universe and human life. This concept is embodied by the Chinese character "piety" and the name of Amitabha Buddha in the Pure Land School. The

names may be different but the meanings are the same: unconditional love for all beings that surpasses space and time.

## The Five Human Relationships

Confucian teachings are based on five human relationships that are founded on moral principles. The five human relationships include those between husband/wife, parent/child, siblings, friends, and political leaders and the public. Husband/wife represents the smallest and the most intimate circle of human relationships. Outside the small circle is the extended family, which includes the relationships between father and son and those among the siblings. Outside the family there is society which includes additional relationships between the individual and his leader and circles of friends. We now often talk about the need to unite people. In ancient times, the Chinese had no use for the word "unite," for the five human relationships define the union of all people. Everyone on this earth is our brother. Each is responsible for the other; parents being compassionate, sons and daughters being filial to their parents, siblings and friends being respectful to each other. In this way, the country and its people are already a perfect union. The relationships between people also define responsibilities from one to the other. Everyone has his own duty and responsibility to fulfill.

## The Practice of Confucianism and Buddhism

Human beings differ from animals by adhering to human relationships and basic moral principles. The practice of Confucianism is based on having sincere and proper thoughts, correct behavior, a well-organized family and country, and peace for all. This is identical to the views of Buddhism, which also emphasizes practicing and learning. It all starts from generating the Bodhicitta mind. "Bodhi" is a Sanskrit word meaning enlightenment. Enlightenment means an "awakened" mind. It is similar to the sincere thought and proper mind advocated by Confucianism. A Chinese government official

defined sincerity very well. He noted that "Sincerity means having no single thought." There will be no sincerity as long as there are corrupted thoughts, wandering thoughts, or even the rise of a single thought. His definition is identical to that of Buddhism. The Sixth Patriarch Hui-Neng once said "... (the pure mind) contains nothing therefore collects no dust". However, people in general have a lot of wandering thoughts. How can one be rid of these wandering thoughts? The Confucian answer is "...to fight against uprising desires and achieve wisdom." This practice was stressed in the elementary school of the Confucian system. Buddha said, severing all desires is to stop all worries and troubles.

## The Confucian Elementary School System

In the past, the Chinese elementary school students were well trained to guard against the uprising of desires. Schools emphasized training in student's concentration and wisdom. Students started school at the age of seven. They stayed with their teachers and only went home during holidays. They were taught the correct way to interact with everyday life and the proper manner to attend to their teachers and elder schoolmates. This was called the education of moral principles based on human relationships. When the children went home, they would then treat their parents and siblings with filial piety and respect.

From the ages of seven to twelve, students were required to memorize and recite fluently the ancient texts. The teacher would first select materials which contained the profound wisdom of sages and saints and then encouraged the students to read and recite the material up to one or two hundred times a day. Children would have scattered thoughts if they were not assigned any tasks to do. The purpose of reciting was to focus their mind so that they would eventually obtain a pure mind, concentration and wisdom; even though, they may not have understood the meanings. However, the current educational system, in existence since the Revolution of 1911, eliminated this two

thousand-year-old tradition and adopted the western educational system. This change, upon close examination, leads one to the root of modern China's social problems.

## The Confucian Tai School System

At the age of thirteen, children were sent to Tai school, as there were no junior or high schools in ancient China. Tai school emphasized the analysis and discussion of the materials students had already memorized in elementary school. The teachers were experts in their fields and would concentrate on that field throughout their entire career. Each of them taught a small class with ten to twenty students and the lectures were not necessarily given in the classroom with textbooks. During that period, all the textbooks were printed in the universal format: twenty words per column and ten columns per page, with no space in between. The format was standard for the entire country regardless of the publisher. Both teacher and students memorized the textbooks so well that they even knew exactly where the study materials were located. Since everything had been memorized earlier, there was no need for books after elementary school.

Teachers often took their students on field trips to broaden their knowledge and experience. As they traveled, knowledge was imparted to them along the way. Thus, the trips were without textbooks or restraints but accompanied with wine and food and filled with joy. The students would attend to the needs of the teacher. Therefore, as they concluded their travels to the many beautiful places, the course would close as well. For many, attending Tai school was the most joyful time of their lives.

In Taiwan, those who are in their eighties or nineties may have experienced this kind of education. My late teacher, Mr. Lee, then in his nineties, could still apply materials he had memorized in elementary school when writing articles; no reference materials were needed. This was the method he used to acquire



the original wisdom that comes from the pure mind. With the pure mind, true wisdom arises. Having true wisdom is to know a person's past and future and also to understand the laws of cause and effect. One should not judge things by their appearance, but know and understand how events came about. The wisdom of knowing nothing emphasized in Buddhism is the original wisdom. Only when one has a pure mind, which contains nothing, will he also know everything when he is in contact with the external world. Therefore, the practicing and studying of Buddhism begins with eliminating all thoughts in order to obtain a pure mind.

All this made me think of our children, who are so pure, so innocent and uncontaminated in their thinking which is why it is best for our children to start learning Buddhism early in childhood. With little effort, children can truly and easily benefit from it. The experiences of a person with a pure mind are so different and profound that no ordinary person can truly appreciate them.

World Peace Can be Achieved if the Mind and Body are Well-trained, the Family is Well-run and the Country is Well-governed.

A true practitioner will keep himself from being greedy, angry, ignorant and arrogant toward others and his environment. If one has any of the elements just mentioned, then he is neither sincere nor proper. Sincerity and proper thoughts and viewpoints are the basis for training the mind. A person with a pure mind and body will not become ill. We suffer from illnesses because our minds are filled with wandering thoughts and worries that are derived from greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance.

As mentioned earlier, sincerity and proper thoughts and viewpoints are the basis for purifying one's mind. A purified mind leads to a purified body and naturally, a person will become immune from illness; thus, a realized practitioner would never get seriously ill. Moreover, if a person is determined

to follow the path of Buddha, he or she will not die in the conventional manner. A conventional death means a person does not know exactly when they will leave this world, nor where they will go afterwards. On the other hand, true practitioners with confidence in themselves and in Amitabha Buddha, who cultivate in accordance with Buddhist teachings, will be capable of controlling both the time of leaving this world and of being born in the Western Pure Land. This is neither unusual nor a fairy tale, but the simple truth, and can be achieved by cultivating the pure mind and vowing to reach the Western Pure Land. Therefore, one needs to understand how important it is to be free of worries and attachments. Every Buddhist should maintain a pure mind and body at all times, treating everyone and everything with equality and composure. Only then would the family be in harmony, the society in unity and the world at peace. No longer would we have feuds, conflicts or wars. The peace and happiness, which we all wish for today, would no longer be a dream. World peace can be achieved if we combine Confucianism and Buddhism into our educational system.

## The Eight Basic Confucian Moral Principles

Loyalty, filial piety, compassion, love, trust-worthiness, responsibility, peace and equality are the eight basic Confucian moral principles and are represented by four Bodhisattvas in Buddhism. Di Tsang Wang (Earth Store /Kristigharba) Bodhisattva represents filial piety and therefore the Di Tsang Sutra is known as the Filial Piety Sutra. This is because it teaches filial respect for both parents and teachers, who are both equally important in Buddhism and Confucianism. To treat one's parents with filial piety and to respect teachers are the innate virtues of human nature. The goal of Buddhist teaching is for us to realize the true nature of the mind, which can only be achieved by discovering its virtuous nature, without which one will never become enlightened.

Guan Yin Bodhisattva symbolizes compassion and represents kindness and love. Wen Shu Shi Li (Manjusri) Bodhisattva symbolizes wisdom and represents faith and loyalty. Pu Xian (Universal Worthy/Samantabhadra) Bodhisattva symbolizes great vows and putting the Buddha's teaching into practice including filial piety, compassion and wisdom. He represents peace and equality. With compassion and wisdom, one can generate merits. To enjoy merits is to build upon the foundation of equality and purity - this is the greatest enjoyment for humankind. To cultivate merits in childhood, generate merits in middle age and enjoy merits in old age are described in Chinese as truth, virtue and beauty. One who enjoys merit in old age is called the complete person, which is similar to Buddha. We must understand that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are not gods but the most perfect and happiest beings for us to learn from. Wise ancestors in China long evoked these principles long ago before Buddhism was introduced there. Buddha Shakyamuni, Confucius and Mencius never met, but they all had identical concepts and teaching methods. That was truly a coincidence and as is said in Chinese, "Heroes would have similar views" or said in the West, "Great minds think alike".

## Chapter Six:

### The Buddha's Teachings are for Everyone

Recently a student came to me and asked how to practice Buddhism. The answer is the Four Universal Vows of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas:

- (1) Sentient beings are innumerable, I vow to help them all;
- (2) Afflictions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them all;
- (3) Ways to practice are boundless, I vow to master them all;
- (4) Enlightenment is unsurpassable; I vow to attain it.

To help others is to do our best in assisting them to break through delusion and become awakened, then they will be able to attain true happiness and leave suffering behind. In order to help all beings escape from suffering, one should be a good cultivator, excelling in moral and academic achievements. A cultivator can learn by upholding the precepts to guard against harmful consequences created by speech, body and mind, i.e. words, deeds and thoughts. Before comprehensive learning, however, it is necessary to cultivate good virtue by ending our afflictions including greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance, as they are the sources of all desires and delusions. True wisdom arises from cultivation of high moral character, from a pure, non-discriminatory and compassionate mind, and not from knowledge gained from books. Without a pure mind, the knowledge gained leads to deviated views. Therefore, the first priority in practicing Buddhism is to purify our mind and cut off all attachments to erroneous ways. With the pure mind we can then reflect everything clearly and know all, thus attaining true wisdom and enlightenment.

Buddhism is for everyone, regardless of gender, age, occupation, nationality or religion. Everyone can learn and practice Buddhism, for it is the teaching of ultimate, perfect wisdom. There is a need for Buddha's teaching in all parts of the world. However, it is not easy to nurture Buddhist teachers. The difficulty lies with the fact that most people cannot renounce their worldly fame and wealth, which are the major obstacles in learning and practicing Buddhism. Without a pure mind, there is no way to truly understand Buddha's teachings and to realize the causes of all the problems in this world. Meanwhile, without virtue of merits and good causes and conditions, practitioners cannot find good teachers. Therefore, I always encourage young practitioners to resolve to save our country and the world.

## Chapter Seven:

### The Key to the Greatest Treasure

Recently, we have established a Pure Land Learning Center in the United States. The goal is to introduce the traditional Chinese culture to Westerners and to help them practice Buddhism. Our ancestors invented the most precious and timeless vehicle: a classical Chinese language, called Wen-Yen-Wen, in order to transmit the ancient culture to future generations and us. With this powerful vehicle, we can read the publications of Confucius or Mencius that were written twenty-five hundred years ago. Because our ancestors realized that language would be changing from time to time, they used this classical Chinese language to pass on their wisdom, thoughts, skills and experiences. It is not difficult to learn Wen-Yen-Wen. Mr. Lee, my teacher, has taught us the secret to reading the classical language; one only has to recite fluently fifty chapters of ancient Chinese literature. In order to write in classical Chinese, one needs to memorize one hundred chapters. With this key, Wen-Yen-Wen, we can have access to and learn Buddhism and ancient Chinese wisdom, for the latest translations of the Buddhist sutras were in this classical language. Along with the pure, non-discriminating and compassionate mind, we can thus unlock our ultimate wisdom.

I have encouraged practitioners to read the Infinite Life Sutra, which is written in a simpler form of this classical Chinese language. The public should easily understand Eighty percent of its content. There are only forty-eight chapters in this compilation of the Infinite Life Sutra, which is close to the amount that Mr. Lee required us to memorize. This is a good way to start learning this classical Chinese language. After reading and memorizing this sutra, I believe there will be no more obstacles in reading other Buddhist sutras. I strongly urge not only practitioners but also Westerners who want to learn the Chinese culture and Buddhism to memorize fifty chapters of Wen-Yen-Wen or the Infinite Life Sutra. With two or three years of effort, one can obtain the key to explore the wonders of ancient Chinese wisdom and at the same time, transform the Buddhist sutras into one's own private treasure. Without this key, having all these collections of sutras and ancient Chinese literature would be futile, for there is no entry into the treasury.



## Elementary School is the Foundation of Happiness

Ladies and gentlemen, parents and students, elementary school is the foundation for happiness in human life, the root of the country's future and the caretaker of the future society. You have made such contributions to this greatest task in human life and society. It is most meaningful and valuable for society to nurture capable and virtuous youth. I would like to extend my gratitude and highest respect to you. I wish all of you inner peace and happiness. May everyone have great health and prosperity!

Volume 2

## To Understand Buddhism

Excerpts From a Talk by Venerable Master Chin Kung, Australia

January, 1996

### Chapter 1.

#### A Virtuous and perfected Education

Today, we see an increasing number of people around the world starting to practice Buddhism. However, not many people truly understand what Buddhism is. Therefore, this becomes a very important topic. What exactly is Buddhism? We need to understand it clearly. Buddhism is a most virtuous and perfect education directed by the Buddha towards all sentient beings in the nine realms. How can we tell that Buddhism is an education? First, we can tell from the way we call Buddha Shakyamuni our "Original Teacher" that he is the founder of Buddhism and that we are his students. From this, it is very apparent that the Buddha and we share a teacher-student relationship. This is only found in education.

If Buddhism is his teaching, who then is the Buddha? Buddha is a Sanskrit word meaning wisdom and enlightenment. However, this wisdom is not the worldly wisdom we think of today. Broadly speaking, the Buddha's wisdom is the ability to ultimately, perfectly and correctly comprehend the true reality of life and the universe in the past, present and future. One who has perceived this wisdom is called a Buddha. Buddha Shakyamuni told us that all sentient beings, including ourselves, possess this innate wisdom and ability. Thus

Buddhism regards all beings equally. Although we are equal in origin, presently we cannot see this because everyone's wisdom and abilities differ.

In our society, there are those who are intelligent and those who are not, those with great ability and those with less. How do these things come about? The Buddha told us that they are due to our varying degrees of delusion. Our innate wisdom and abilities are temporarily lost due to this delusion, but are not truly or permanently lost. If we can break through this delusion, then we will be able to recover these abilities. Therefore, the Buddha's teachings show us how to rid ourselves of delusion and to uncover our innate abilities.

It is often stated in Mahayana sutras that the Buddha did not directly help sentient beings. Then how do sentient beings become Buddhas? By themselves. The Buddha only assists from the side by explaining the true reality of how we delude ourselves. After realizing this, we diligently put his teachings into practice to attain enlightenment of true reality. We then become Buddhas. Buddha Shakyamuni clearly explained that becoming a Buddha is attainable by all sentient beings.

From this, we can see that Buddhism is a teaching. However, a teacher can only educate us about the principles, tell us of his/her experiences in practice and attainment, and suggest various methods for our attainment. The rest ultimately depends upon us. We are the ones who need to be enthusiastic and diligent in order to attain achievement. Once we understand that Buddhism is an education, we will logically regard the Buddha as our teacher. From this, we understand that in proper Way Places, we do not regard the Buddha or Bodhisattva images as gods to be worshipped. We make offerings to these images for two reasons. First, to remember and repay our gratitude for this truly great education, which we have so fortunately encountered and accepted in this lifetime.

The opening verse to sutras says it very well; "It is extremely difficult to encounter this teaching in infinite eons." The debt of gratitude we owe the Buddha is similar to the remembrance, which some Chinese have toward their ancestors. We reflect on our origins for without these ancestors we would not exist. The second reason we make offerings to the Buddha is to follow the examples of the virtuous. Buddha Shakyamuni was an ordinary person like us; yet, he was able to be awakened and become a Buddha. What is there to stop us from achieving this as well? Therefore, the pictures or statues of the Buddha serve to remind us every moment to advance diligently towards this goal. The images are not to be regarded as gods or objects of superstition.

In Buddhist Way Places, the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have many appearances. This has often led to the misconception that not only is Buddhism a religion but one that worships multi-deities as well. Indeed Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have many names. For example, in the Tripitaka there is the Ten Thousand-Buddha Names Sutra, which gives us over twelve thousand Buddha's names and even more names for Bodhisattvas. Why are there so many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas? Within our original-nature there exists infinite wisdom, virtuous and artistic abilities that cannot be completely represented by merely one name. It is similar to a highly accomplished person in a prominent position; his or her business card could have numerous titles.

The names of the Buddhas represent the complete, innate and virtuous abilities within our self-nature. All the Bodhisattva names represent cultivation of different virtues. The original abilities within our self-nature are infinite, but temporarily lost. Without genuine cultivation, we will not be able to uncover any of them. All the Buddha and Bodhisattva names are none other than ourselves. Once we understand this, we will realize that a high level of artistry represents the styles of the Buddha's teachings. For example, sculptures and pictures can express the Dharma. Understanding the true

meaning of these images will help one to gain the true benefits of the Buddha's teachings.

If Buddhism is not a religion, why is it not then a philosophy? In philosophy, there is both a subject and an object. In Mahayana Buddhism, there is no difference between subject and object; they are one. This meaning is very profound and difficult to understand. For example, a great master said, "Utilizing gold to form utensils, all utensils are of gold." Are the gold and the utensil the same thing or different? From their appearances they look like two different things. However, from their composition we realize that they are the same. One needs a profound intuitive comprehension to truly understand the reality of life and the universe. All of the Mahayana Sutras try to explain this concept and truth. One will share the same viewpoints with the Buddha when one truly understands and clearly recognizes this truth. Ordinary people, like we are deluded. In what way? Because we see everything in opposition to the other, not knowing that in reality that everything is actually one and not two.

## Chapter two:

### The goal of the Buddha's teaching

From the intrinsic nature of Buddhism, we proceed to the goal of the Buddha's teachings. This goal is to break through delusion and achieve enlightenment. The Buddha pointed out to us why we are leading lives of suffering and why the six realms of reincarnation exist. It is so, because the wisdom and virtuous abilities in our original nature have yet to be uncovered. Thus, all our viewpoints and ways of interacting with life and the universe are incorrect. The erroneous acts committed due to these incorrect viewpoints and ways have resulted in the suffering of reincarnation within the six realms.

The goal of the Buddha's teachings is to help and guide us to break through our delusion, to be awakened and escape this suffering and to obtain

happiness. What do we seek in Buddhism? We seek Annuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi, the Perfect Complete Enlightenment. The Buddha teaches and hopes that all of us will attain this ultimate enlightenment, in other words, will become a Buddha.

The Perfect Complete Enlightenment can be explained as three levels: Arhats, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. The first is "Proper Enlightenment." In our world, there are some very intelligent and wise people, such as scientists, philosophers and religious leaders. They have reached higher realization than most people have. However, although they may have reached a certain level of realization, the Buddha would not recognize their knowledge as the proper enlightenment, because they have not severed their afflictions. They still dwell on the rights and wrongs of others, on greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance. They still harbor wandering, discriminatory thoughts and attachments. In other words, their minds are not pure. Without the pure mind, no matter how high the level of realization one reaches, it is still not the proper enlightenment.

In Buddhism, the standard for proper enlightenment is the pure mind from which wisdom arises. It is the wish of all Buddhas that we attain this proper enlightenment. This is the level or degree of an Arhat and is similar to attending a university to earn an undergraduate degree. Therefore, Arhat, Bodhisattva and Buddha are titles similar to degrees of enlightenment attained in Buddhism. Those who achieve proper enlightenment are called Arhats. Arhats do not have illusory or misleading thoughts and viewpoints. They do not dwell on the rights and wrongs of others, or on thoughts of greed, anger, ignorance or arrogance.

From this, we can comprehend intuitively the difference between Buddhism and worldly education. From the Buddha, we learn the true teachings and proper enlightenment. Only with this proper enlightenment can one escape all sufferings to obtain true happiness. As human beings, we undergo the

sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. We do not attain what we seek, are parted with our loved ones and find ourselves in the presence of those whom we resent or even hate. We are surrounded by all these sufferings with no apparent way of being truly free. Only after learning Buddhism will we be able to reach genuine liberation.

The Flower Adornment Sutra explains to us, "All sentient beings possess the same wisdom and virtuous capabilities as the Buddha, but these qualities are unattainable due to wandering thoughts and attachments." This clearly explains the root cause of our problems. Practicing Buddhism is to accord with the teachings of the Buddha, to rid us of wandering, discriminating thoughts and attachments. Thus, we uncover our pure mind, in turn giving rise to true wisdom, which is proper enlightenment. Therefore, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas would not recognize the intelligent and worldly wisdom, as it lacks the pure mind, the proper enlightenment. Upon attaining proper enlightenment, one has the ability to transcend the endless cycles of birth and death, not to mention the ability to solve everyday problems.

Whether talking about the Buddha's education or worldly education, it is essential to understand the concept of delving deeply into one method in order to attain achievement. This is especially so in Buddhism. One who truly wishes to learn effectively needs to follow only one teacher and practice only one path to ensure a smooth journey. When following two teachers with two different paths, one is bound to become confused as to which path to take. Even worse, following three teachers catches one at a T street. With four teachers one is caught at a cross street. Today's young people like to learn a lot, but fail to attain a good result. The problem lies with being caught at those cross streets, confused as to which way to take. For one to succeed and attain achievement in practicing Buddhism, one needs to follow just one teacher and concentrate on just one method.

What is this achievement? True achievement is attaining a pure mind. Upon achieving some degree of pure mind, one will have fewer afflictions and thus an increase in true wisdom, enabling one to solve problems in this world and beyond. Without this true wisdom, there is no way to truly solve problems. Therefore, true wisdom is essential in leading a happy and fulfilling life. On a broader scale, it can help us to solve society's problems.

Today there are many intelligent politicians who thought they were very smart but have ended up bringing their countries to the brink of disaster, as well as putting their citizens through much misery. What is the reason for this? These leaders have not severed their afflictions, discriminating and wandering thoughts, and attachments. Consequently, their first consideration is their own benefit, their self-attachment.

The Buddha taught us to attain true wisdom by first breaking free of our own viewpoints. Without this wisdom, one could misinterpret the meanings within the Mahayana sutras. If one is able to part from the selfish mind, then true benefits will definitely be received. With proper enlightenment, only when one has no ego or self-attachment, will one be able to differentiate true from false, proper from deviated, right from wrong and beneficial from harmful. Without breaking through one's own viewpoints, one will not have these abilities. From this, we understand there is a standard to the proper enlightenment.

One level above the proper enlightenment is the "Equal and Proper Enlightenment." Equal means equal to the Buddha, but not yet having become a Buddha. This level is higher than that of an Arhat. The equal and proper enlightenment requires one to break through one degree of ignorance, to attain one degree of Dharma body. At this point, the way one views the reality of life and the universe is very close to that of the Buddhas. One who achieves the equal and proper enlightenment would be called a Bodhisattva.



The Flower Adornment Sutra explains the forty-one levels of Bodhisattvas, all of which have these levels of enlightenment. After breaking through the very last degree of ignorance, perfecting wisdom and enlightenment, one achieves the "Perfect, Complete Enlightenment" that is Buddhahood. Therefore, Buddha, Bodhisattva and Arhat are common titles, not a specific name for a specific person. They are titles similar to those of Doctorate, Master or Graduate degrees. For example, in the name Guan Yin Bodhisattva, Guan Yin represents great compassion and kindness. The title of Bodhisattva is similar to a Masters Degree. Presently, people have misconceptions about Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, thinking these names are specific beings. They do not understand that these titles refer to any being who possesses those characteristics. Buddha or Bodhisattva, when added to a name is simply referring to a specialty.

From the intrinsic nature of Buddhism, we realize that our purpose of practice is to seek wisdom. In Zen, this goal is called, "In pursuit of clarity of mind to see into one's self-nature." In other words "Complete Enlightenment." In the Pure Land School, this is called "One Mind Undisturbed." The Pure Land School is unique in that not only does one seek to have One Mind Undisturbed but also seeks birth into the Western Pure Land. This is unlike other schools, which rely on one's own strength of cultivation in seeking solely one goal. The Pure Land method has two goals that can be achieved in one lifetime.

One who is very familiar with the Infinite Life Sutra and understood its teachings would be free of doubt. The full title of this sutra reveals the goals of our practice: The Buddha Speaks of the Infinite Life Sutra of Adornment, Purity, Equality and Enlightenment of the Mahayana School. Infinite life and adornment are what Pure Land practitioners seek. Infinite life refers to the merits and virtues of one's perfect self-nature. Adornment refers to perfect complete wisdom with great ease and fulfillment. Purity, equality and enlightenment are the methods, the three ways of practice. Upon attaining any

one, all three are attained. Of all the schools of Buddhism, none surpass these three ways of practice.

The Zen School uses the awakening path to reach the great enlightenment and attain the clarity to see into one's true nature. Buddhist schools other than Zen stress the practice of understanding or proper viewpoints, until reaching great complete understanding. The Pure Land School, on the other hand, concentrates on the pure mind. A person with purity of mind will naturally be non-discriminating and awakened. An awakened person will naturally have a pure and non-discriminating mind. The route chosen may be different but all reach the same goal. In Zen practice it is expressed as "obtaining clarity of mind and seeing into one's true nature."

Different schools may use different names but the results or the level of the state of mind are the same. Therefore, to criticize any other schools would be to slander both the Buddha and the Dharma. All these methods were passed down to us from Buddha Shakyamuni. Choosing any path will enable one to attain achievement. How can we say that one method is better than another? From all these different methods we just need to know how to choose the one method that is most suitable for us and our level.

First, if the level of the method we chose were beyond us, making it difficult to practice, we would not succeed easily with that method. Second, it needs to be suitable and convenient for our manner of living. Third, it needs to be compatible with modern society, because we cannot separate ourselves from society or other human beings. Therefore, we need to consider these factors to choose our method of cultivation.

However, no matter which method one practices, it is essential to be rid of self-viewpoint and attachment in order to obtain the benefits from practice. Or else, like so many have experienced, the great efforts put into the practice will have been in vain. Some practitioners have felt that even after years of practice

they have achieved virtually nothing, even to the point of feeling that they were better off before they practiced. It seemed as if the more they practiced, the worse they felt. All this comes from having chosen a method that was unsuitable for them. This is similar to choosing an unsuitable major in school. When one chooses a major that is not suited to one's foundation and ability, one has an extremely difficult time trying to succeed. Choosing the right major makes studying much easier, so one will have a much better chance of success. The same thing goes for practicing Buddhism. If one does not know one's own capacity, one can test oneself.

Like myself, for example. After reading many Mahayana sutras, I thought myself incapable of any achievement. I wanted very much to sever my wandering, discriminating thoughts and attachments, but was unable to. Finally, I chose the Pure Land method to attain achievement. It does not require one to be completely rid of but rather to suppress these hindrances. As long as one is able to suppress all afflictions, one can still be born into the Western Pure Land carrying over one's existing karma.

This method suits me very well and thus is how I chose it. Previously, I had tried Zen, the Teaching Schools, the Esoteric School and the practice of following the precepts, but could not reach achievement with them. Thus, I came back to the Pure Land method and wholeheartedly delved deeply into the Buddha Name Chanting Method while concentrating solely on lecturing on the Pure Land sutras. These are my experiences from decades of practice.

## Chapter three:

### Symbolism and the arts

After we understand clearly the goal of the Buddha's teachings, we will view the sutras differently. These sutras are one of the world's largest literary collections. I believe that when considering the range of all academia, none of

them surpass Buddhism. To obtain the benefits from this vast collection, it is necessary for us to know and understand the essence of its content, which is the true reality of all Dharma, the true reality of life and the universe. Life refers to ourselves. Universe refers to the living environment that surrounds us. It would be incorrect to treat Buddhism as an abstract and obscure learning that had nothing to do with our daily lives. Every word in the sutra closely relates to our daily living. Furthermore, it is definitely not superstition.

How and where do we start? For convenience, the perfection in the methods of the Buddha's teaching, uses a high level of creativity. Buddhism of two thousand years ago had already taken an artistic path. For example, all the Buddha's names and sculptures represent our virtuous nature, innate qualities of wisdom, virtuous abilities and artistic talents. All of the Bodhisattva's names and forms represent our cultivation of virtue. They instruct us how to apply the teachings in our daily lives to bring out our virtuous nature so that we may receive Buddhism's benefits.

In Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, four great Bodhisattvas represent our order of practice and level of achievement. The first is Earth Store Bodhisattva. Whether we are thinking of worldly teachings, the dharma or Buddhism; nothing can be accomplished without the earth or a place of existence. The existence of humans cannot be separated from our great earth as we rely upon it for survival. Whether clothing, food, living or working, all rely on the production of the land, thus the infinite treasures that the great earth encompasses are seemingly endless for us to use. The word "earth" in the name Earth Store Bodhisattva represents the mind and the word "store" means treasure.

The Buddha's teachings guide us to first start the practice from our mind, as our true nature encompasses the infinite wisdom and virtuous abilities that are no different from those of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas. However, today it seems as if we have lost our innate wisdom and virtuous abilities. The Buddha

told us that all these qualities are not truly lost, just not yet uncovered. In the present moment, we endlessly immerse ourselves in wandering, discriminating thoughts and attachments, which have resulted in this temporary loss of abilities. However, inside the true mind, no wandering thoughts exist. If a mind has wandering thoughts then that mind is a false one. We originally possessed this true mind, so practicing Buddhism is simply recovering it. Therefore, our first goal in practice is to uncover and look for the treasure in our mind. In other words, the Buddha's teachings do not seek from the outside but rather they seek from within our self-nature.

Earth Store Bodhisattva represents filial piety; thus, the Earth Store Sutra is about filial piety, a basic concept that everyone would do well to start from. The kindness that our parents have shown by giving us life and nurturing us is beyond description. To be filial and take care of our parents is naturally our basic responsibility. Not only do we need to take care of their material needs but of their spiritual life as well. Moreover, we need to nurture their aspirations for us and for us, this is the hardest of all. Parents wish their children to have successful careers, behave well, and to be respected by current and future generations. In other words, we would do well to act in a manner, which will make them proud of us. Therefore, the ultimate and perfect achievement of filial piety is to become Buddha. We begin our practice from here and expand our filial piety and respect to include all sentient beings.

The second Bodhisattva, Guan Yin, represents the cultivation of great compassion and kindness. What is the meaning of making offerings to Guan Yin Bodhisattva? It is to remind us that we would do well to treat all people with great compassion and kindness, to use unconditional love and care to help all sentient beings.

The third Bodhisattva, Manjusri, represents wisdom and rationale, reminding us that when we practice and interact with others we need to fulfill our filial duty, to rely upon wisdom and rationale, not on emotion. The fourth

Bodhisattva, the Great Samantabhadra (Universal Worthy) represents carrying out the cultivation truthfully, applying filial piety, compassion, kindness and rationale in our daily lives. When one perfectly achieves the way of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, one becomes a Buddha. Buddhism teaches us how to live in harmony with the true reality of life and the universe. In other words, we would live perfect and wonderful lives similar to those of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This is the true, ultimate and perfect Mahayana teaching.

To practice Buddhism, we start by:

- (1) Being filial and respectful toward parents, teachers and elders,
- (2) Having the great compassionate mind,
- (3) Nurturing one's thinking and wisdom and
- (4) Broadening one's mind.

Although in sequence, they also can be practiced simultaneously, as each encompasses the others. For example, being filial to parents includes compassion and kindness, reasoning and wisdom. Wisdom includes being filial, compassionate and kind.

Once we have a general understanding of Buddhism, how do we apply it to our daily living? First we need to know what each Buddha and Bodhisattva represents. If we do not, then Buddhism would be reduced to superstition and we would not receive its true benefits. All Buddhist sutras contain these qualities, characteristics and the ways of practice; therefore, learning only one

sutra will be enough. One needs to know how to understand and apply the teachings effectively.

Usually in the center of the main hall of a way place, there are statues of one Buddha and two Bodhisattvas, which represent our self-nature and original entity. The two Bodhisattvas represent our virtuous abilities within our self-nature; one is understanding and the other is practice. If the Buddha in the middle is Buddha Shakyamuni, then the two figures on either side of him will be Manjusri and Universal Worthy Bodhisattvas, representing wisdom and application respectively. Thus, understanding and practice are combined into one. If the hall has the three sages of the Western Pure Land, with Buddha Amitabha in the middle, representing self-nature, then the two figures on either side of him will be Guan Yin and Great Strength Bodhisattvas. They respectively represent compassion and wisdom, completely symbolizing the infinite wisdom and virtuous capabilities. Therefore, we again see that Buddhism is a teaching.

There are profound teachings within the names of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, for example the name of Buddha Shakyamuni tells us the principles of the Buddha's education. "Shakya" means humanity and kindness. "Muni" means purity of mind. The teaching of these two qualities are advocated because people in our world lack compassion and kindness, and are often selfish. Moreover, all sentient beings lack purity of mind, constantly dwelling in wandering thoughts, greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance. Any Bodhisattva who becomes a Buddha in this world will be named Shakyamuni to teach us the remedy for our problems. Once the representations of Buddha and Bodhisattva statues are understood intuitively just by looking at them, one will perfectly comprehend the goal of the Buddha's teachings.

When we enter the first hall of a way place, the Hall of Heavenly Guardians, we will see the statue of Maitreya Bodhisattva surrounded by the four Heavenly Guardians in the middle of the hall. Maitreya Bodhisattva, known in

the west as the Happy Buddha, has a huge smile representing joyfulness. His great stomach represents enormous tolerance and broad-mindedness, teaching us to interact with others and matters with joy, to be non-discriminating and tolerant. Next to him are four Heavenly Guardians or Dharma Protectors who teach us how to protect ourselves.

The Eastern Dharma Protector, symbolizes fulfilling one's duty and responsibility, teaching us that regardless of position, one needs to fulfill one's duties. He is holding a lute in his hand. The strings of the instrument should not be too tight, or else they will break; nor should they be too loose or they will not play well. When properly adjusted and balanced, the instrument will play beautifully, clearly symbolizing that we need to take the middle path when interacting with matters, people and objects. When each of us fulfills our responsibilities and obligations, how could the nation not prosper?

The Southern Dharma Protector symbolizes improvement and daily advancement. Not only do matters need to be taken care of appropriately; continuous improvement also needs to be sought. In his right hand, the Southern Dharma Protector holds the sword of wisdom and in his left hand a ring symbolizing the perfection of wisdom, showing us that one needs to use wisdom in seeking improvement. The sword symbolizes how one needs to sever afflictions before they are out of control.

The third and fourth Heavenly Guardians are the Western and the Northern Dharma Protectors, representing comprehensive vision and listening respectively. Both teach us to observe and listen more carefully as well as to read numerous books and travel to many places for comprehensive learning. They teach us to do well in our job, to adopt the good qualities as well as to disregard the shortcomings of others.

The Western Dharma Protector represents far-sighted observation and holds a dragon or snake. The dragon or snake symbolizes constant change. In his



other hand, he holds a bead, symbolizing principles. People, matters and objects in society undergo changes constantly. One needs to observe very carefully and thoroughly, to have a firm grasp on the principles within in order to be able to control this "dragon or snake." The Northern Dharma Protector holds an umbrella to prevent one from being contaminated. This reminds us that within a complex society, one needs to know how to protect one's body and mind from pollution and corruption. From these examples, we can see that the artistic aspects of the Buddha's education are truly beautiful. Unfortunately, many people regard these Dharma protectors as gods to be worshipped, which is totally wrong.

## Chapter four:

### The five guidelines of practice

After establishing Pure Land Learning Centers in several countries, we set five guidelines for Pure Land practitioners to follow. These five guidelines were extracted from the five Pure Land sutras to be applied in daily living. The first guideline is the Three Conditions, extracted from the Visualization Sutra, which provides a very important foundation for cultivation. The Buddha stated in the sutra that these Three Conditions are the proper causes of which all the Buddhas from the past, present and future practice their pure karma. In other words, all the people who became Buddhas perfected these as their foundation; thus, we cannot disregard them.

The First Condition concerns the good fortune of heavenly beings and humans. Before one can become a Buddha or a Bodhisattva, one needs to first become a good person. The criteria for this are:

(A) Being filial and respectful toward parents, teachers, and elders,

(B) Being compassionate and not killing any living being and

(C) Practicing the Ten Good Conducts.

With this first step, we begin to practice Buddhism.

The Second Condition includes:

(A) Taking the Three Refuges,

(B) Abiding by laws, customs, and precepts and

(C) Conducting oneself in proper and dignified manner.

The main principle of our practice is awakening, proper thoughts and viewpoints, and purity. A beginning step in learning Buddhism is to Take Refuge in the Triple Jewels. After one generates the heart to Take Refuge in the Triple Jewels by accepting, learning and practicing Buddhism, one finds a Dharma Master to pass on the principle, goal and direction of practicing Buddhism. The Triple Jewels are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. In appearance, they are pictures or sculptures of Buddhas, Buddhist sutras, and monks and nuns, respectively. Another way of understanding them is that they are the true Triple Jewels within our true mind.

The Buddha taught us to take refuge in the Triple Jewels of our self-nature. To return and rely upon the Buddha is to rely on the awakening in our self-nature. What is this awakening? Currently, we are deluded and not awakened. How did we become deluded? Delusion is due to our discriminating mind and attachments. If we part from this discriminating mind and attachments, can we still see objects clearly? We cannot say we do not see them, but if we see them very clearly without discriminating thoughts and attachments, then we are awakened. When there is the slightest discrimination or attachment, one is deluded.

The same applies to our attaching to the form we are looking at; it is delusion. Initially, objects do not have names but are given them by people. The names, like the object, are not real. Apart from the names and appearances, what we see is the true form. We are deluded about these forms, their physical features and their names. Consequently, when we rid ourselves of these delusions, we will not be attached. This is how we can train ourselves to return and rely upon the Buddha Jewel or Enlightenment.

If someone points to a table and asks what it is, we will naturally say it is a table because that is what everybody calls it. We go along with everybody's attachment but if we are not attached to it ourselves, then we will be awakened. Therefore, the minds of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are pure and without the slightest pollution for they are completely without these attachments. When with others, we can go along with them but maintain our purity inside. In this way, we return and rely upon awakening. After taking refuge, when we apply this concept to our daily living, whether interacting with people, matters or objects, we will no longer be deluded. Our mind will always be pure, non-discriminating and able to help all sentient beings. This is to return and rely upon awakening or the Buddha Jewel.

The Dharma that we return to and rely upon refers to proper thoughts and viewpoints, which is hard to accomplish. Only when we are truly enlightened, will our thoughts and viewpoints be correct. Before we reach enlightenment, we can adopt the proper thoughts and viewpoints of Buddha Shakyamuni as ours. All the thoughts and viewpoints within the sutras are correct. We can at first rely on Buddha Shakyamuni, but only for a while, as he does not want us to rely upon him forever. This is like a student relying on teachers in school but becoming independent after graduation. Likewise, before we attain great enlightenment, we need to rely on Buddha Shakyamuni and Buddha Amitabha as our teachers.

Where is the Buddha? The Buddha is within the sutras, as Buddha Shakyamuni stated in the Infinite Life Sutra and Buddha Amitabha relayed to us through the Forty-eight Great Vows. Relying on the teachings within the sutra is relying on the Buddha. We would do well to practice earnestly what the Buddha taught us to do or refrain from doing. In this way we will be true and good students. Applying this concept in our daily living is to return and rely upon the Dharma Jewel.

The Sangha of the Sangha Jewel represents purity and harmony as in the Six Principles of Harmony. Consequently, whenever we see a monk and nun, we do not want to dwell on whether this person is a great cultivator or a violator of precepts. Whether they are or are not is not our concern. Seeing a monk or a nun reminds us to see whether we ourselves have lived by the Six Principles of Harmony, or have cultivated purity of mind. To truly take refuge is to know how to reflect on ourselves, since we still have all the same bad habits and are committing the same offenses, having been deluded for infinite eons.

It would be helpful for Buddhists to set up the Triple Jewels in their home. When we make offerings to the Buddha statue or picture, we will be reminded that we need to be awakened. How? When our six senses encounter the external environment, we would not discriminate or attach, or give rise to any thoughts. For example, meditation is not giving rise to any discriminating thoughts or attachments. Thus one achieves a high level of wisdom and is able to see all situations clearly. However, ordinary people like us, use the false mind and constantly give rise to wandering and discriminating thoughts and attachments in these situations. The appearance of everything we see is false. Once we have understood these principles and learned how to not have wandering thoughts and attachments, we can also become a Bodhisattva or Buddha.

Taking the Three Refuges is a beginning step in practicing Buddhism. From there, we proceed on to the foundation of Theravada Buddhism then to Mahayana Buddhism for the Third Condition, which is comprised of:

- (A) Generating the Bodhi mind,
- (B) Deeply believing in the Law of Cause and Effect,
- (C) Reciting and upholding Mahayana sutras and
- (D) Encouraging others on the path to Enlightenment.

Before practicing Mahayana Buddhism, we need to generate the Bodhi mind. Bodhi means awakening, thus, the Bodhi mind is an awakened mind. How will one be awakened? When one first realizes and understands that this world is full of sufferings.

Upon careful and rational observation of society, we may find our conclusions frightening. Looking back over the last thirty years, we see that people used to be kinder and more considerate. Whereas, people nowadays are more selfish and usually only think of benefiting oneself at the expense of others. This selfishness has created a chaotic world making even the climate abnormal. Therefore, the first thing in generating the Bodhi mind is to realize that this world is filled with suffering and that the Western Pure Land is filled with bliss. True awakening is when one seeks to escape these sufferings then to attain happiness.

Second, awakening is the aspiration to benefit and help all sentient beings, to think of others and not of oneself. What are the urgent needs of sentient

beings? There is nothing more important than the Buddha's teachings. Thus, our most pressing need is nurturing and training lecturers to continue to pass on Buddhism. Today due to our advanced printing skills, numerous sutras have been distributed throughout the world, but regrettably, few people lecture on them. Since people have the tendency to misunderstand the meanings within the sutras, we need qualified people to lecture and explain them. Today the best way to benefit others is to train lecturers and at the same time gain innumerable merits. We work toward this goal with a great tolerant mind, not just for one Way Place, area or country but for the whole world. If only one country prospers and the others are poor, the poor will envy and resent the prosperous, leading to conflicts or worse. How could one pass the days peacefully knowing this? If everyone is prosperous, then all will be happy and peaceful.

Once there is a good number of lecturers to help others clearly understand the principles of the Buddha's teachings, they will in turn gradually help others in reaching awakening to break through delusion and escape suffering thus attaining happiness. This is the most beneficial way for one to put the Bodhi mind into practice.

To believe deeply in the Law of Cause and Effect does not simply refer to "What goes around comes around." The profound meaning is, "Being mindful of Buddha Amitabha is the cause and becoming Buddha is the consequence."

For the Pure Land practitioner, reciting and upholding Mahayana Sutras can be accomplished by reciting the Infinite Life Sutra. Delving deeply into one

method can be achieved by concentrating on one sutra. If one does not think this is sufficient, the four other sutras and one commentary of the Pure Land School could also be recited. These six are more than enough. Simply allow them to take root and flourish. Finally, one encourages others on the path to enlightenment. The first three parts of the Third Condition benefit the self. The last one teaches us to dedicate the benefits we have received to all others; to help them to understand, practice and succeed in their cultivation of Buddhism. When attaining achievement in the Buddha's teachings, one succeeds in attaining infinite wisdom.

## The Six Harmonies

The Three Conditions are the first of The Five Guidelines of the foundation for Pure Land practice. We have yet to become Buddhas or to depart from this world. Even when one becomes a Buddha, one does not leave all behind as Buddhas want to help all sentient beings in the ten directions.

How does one get along with others harmoniously? The Buddha set six principles for us to follow. Not only are these applicable within a Buddhist community but also in all organizations or groups. When we take refuge in the Triple Jewels, there is a saying, "To return and rely upon the Sangha, the most worthy of respect of all groups." Group means a gathering of people. In our society, the smallest group of people is a family, a larger one is a nation and the largest is the union of many nations. Actually, the whole world is a group of which we all are a part. Why is a Buddhist community the most precious of all groups? The six rules that the Buddha set for Buddhist communities are something all its members follow, making this group the most worthy of respect and of being a role model for all.

The first of the Six Principles of Harmony is to share the same goals and viewpoints, in other words to establish a common consensus. Everyone within this group shares similar thoughts and viewpoints, providing the foundation for living in harmony. If everyone has different viewpoints and ideas, then conflicts would be unavoidable, making the group discordant. Therefore, sharing the same goals and viewpoints is very important, making this the first of the Six Principles.

The second of the Principles is to observe the same precepts and rules. There are both broad and narrow meanings within the word "Precept." The narrow meaning includes upholding the five or ten layperson precepts, monk's or nun's precepts, or Bodhisattva precepts and the Buddha's teachings. In a broader sense, "Observing precepts" includes abiding by etiquette, customs, rules and laws of the entire world.

Today, through the advancement of technology in travel and communication, our sphere of activity is not limited to our country but expands to other countries as well. Whether sightseeing, on business, or visiting others, it is essential to observe the local customs and laws, to live in harmony, thus being welcomed and respected by others. This principle is practical and brings joy to others; therefore, upholding Buddhist precepts also includes following the customs and laws of the country. All governments welcome law-abiding citizens, so to truly promote and be a benefactor of Buddhism is to uphold the precepts. With this as a base, people could then harmoniously live without arguments and share the joy of practicing together. When living together and sharing a common consensus, a group would naturally not have any conflicts. To practice with the same goal and to achieve improvement daily would ensure that the community would experience joy and inner peace.



The last of the Six Principles is to share benefits equally. Benefits refer to our daily necessities. A Sangha does not merely represent a community of monks and nuns. At home, the family can also practice Buddhism and accord with the Six Principles of Harmony to make up a sangha. Even within a company, everyone, from the employer to the workers, can practice Buddhism to make up a sangha. Therefore, sangha has a very broad meaning. Within a Sangha, one strives to share benefits. For left-home people it means having the same manner of living, from the abbot to one with no formal responsibilities within the community, everyone shares the same manner of living, with no special treatment. We would do well to live by the Six Principles of Harmony to learn how to better get along with others. When with other organizations or groups, regardless of whether or not they follow the Six Principles of Harmony, we ourselves need to accord with the spirit of these Principles to truly follow the Buddha's teachings.

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are our best role models while we are to be good role models for others who are not Buddhists. This is the spirit of Buddhism, using our own behavior to influence and benefit others, thus promoting Buddhism. We do not teach others in the formal sense but simply let them observe us. Thus our daily conduct and practice can unobtrusively and imperceptibly help to influence and change others like Buddhas or Bodhisattvas manifesting in this world to teach sentient beings.

## The Three Learnings

The third guideline is the Three Learnings: self-discipline, concentration and wisdom. The Three Learnings summarize all the teachings from Buddha Shakyamuni and all the Buddhas in the past, present and future. The Great Canon of Sutras is divided into three sections: sutras, vinaya or precepts, and sastras or commentaries. Sutras include the teachings of meditation, vinaya includes the teachings of self-discipline or precepts, sastra includes the teachings of wisdom. These Three Learnings of self-discipline, concentration and meditation represent the core of the Buddha's teachings.

The teachings of precepts place most emphasis on rules, regulations and laws. The earth has four seasonal changes: spring, summer, autumn and winter. We need rules and laws to successfully interact with people and matters, thus enabling the members of society to enjoy a wonderful and fulfilling life. A world absent of law and order is a world of chaos. Although one may possess good fortune and wealth, one may still be unhappy, living in fear and insecurity. Why? We have discarded law and order. The precepts thoroughly explain the principles, methods and the level of mind we need to bring about law and order. The Three Learnings clearly explain this concept. We practice the Buddha's teachings in order to attain the ultimate, perfect wisdom. Once we uncover this inner wisdom, we will know the true reality of life and the universe, including how to restore our original abilities.

The Buddha told us that all sentient beings possess a Buddha's wisdom and virtuous abilities. While the knowledge of the past, present and future is part of our original ability, they are unfortunately covered and hidden by our delusion. Delusion occurs when the mind/heart is not still, while an enlightened one remains unaffected. When our six senses encounter the environment, our mind/heart moves, giving rise to wandering thoughts.

The Buddha taught numerous ways to practice so we can remain unaffected in all situations, not giving rise to any wandering, discriminating thoughts or attachments, thus recovering our original capabilities. This state of mind is deep concentration. Cultivation is correcting one's erroneous thoughts, speech and behavior. What are the standards for these? They are discipline and concentration. Discipline is the external standard and precept observation is the internal standard; concentration is the standard for the pure mind. The external standard is very important, but much more important is the internal standard, because it helps us to achieve our goal in the practice to attain wisdom.

With self-discipline, we attain the concentration that gives rise to wisdom. This ultimate, perfect wisdom is "Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi." How does one first attain proper realization, then equal and proper realization, and finally perfect, complete realization? These levels of attainment depend on the strength of concentration, the extent of the purity of mind. As Buddhists, the goal of our practice is Perfect, Complete Enlightenment. If one departs from rules of order and purity of mind, one is not practicing Buddhism. No matter which method one practices, whether Buddha Name Chanting, precept observing, mantra chanting, or Zen meditation; if one does not follow the guidelines, one cannot attain the pure mind. All would be just window dressing. With one degree of pure mind, we attain one degree of wisdom. With two degrees of pure mind, we attain two degrees of wisdom, etc. Therefore, practicing accordingly and maintaining and protecting the pure mind, which gives rise to true wisdom, is exceptionally important.

## **The Six Paramitas or Principles**

The fourth guideline is the Six Principles or Paramitas that are the primary living principles of Bodhisattvas. Each principle encompasses our whole way of living; for example, the first of the Six Principles is "Giving." Some people think of giving as simply donating money. Actually, this is only one of the infinite kinds of giving. From the appearance, giving is sacrificing oneself to give to others. However, from its intrinsic nature, giving is letting go.

We can practice giving of our wealth or physical strength. For example, a homemaker keeps house daily providing a comfortable environment for the family. Without proper understanding, this homemaker may feel these daily chores are repetitive; that washing clothes and cooking meals are boring. If however, the homemaker clearly understands that he or she is cultivating the Bodhisattva Way by practicing the Six Principles, then he or she will be filled with joy. Changing one's perception of doing the same chores with a giving, non-attaching heart is practicing the principle of giving. Not only does one serve the whole family by keeping the house neat, but one also serves as a role model for all relatives and neighbors. In this way, not just one but all beings benefit. One is thus a family role model for all families. Whether managing a store or business, being a role model for others is practicing the Bodhisattva Way in guiding sentient beings. The principle of giving can be expanded to the infinite universe and beyond. With this extensive broadmindedness, one is a Mahayana Bodhisattva.

Giving is comprised of three categories: wealth, teaching and fearlessness. The giving of wealth includes internal and external wealth. Internal wealth involves all of our mental and physical labors that benefit others. External

wealth is the giving of all other things, e.g. money, food, etc. Gaining wealth is the result of giving wealth. The giving of teaching is the willingness to instruct others while not selfishly holding back any knowledge. It is to do one's best in educating willing students. As a result, one gains intelligence and wisdom. The giving of fearlessness includes soothing away other's fears and providing a feeling of security. As a result, one gains health and long life. Most people wish for wealth, intelligence, wisdom, health and long life. When there is a good cause, a good reward will follow. One does not receive a reward without first planting the good cause. By practicing all three kinds of giving, one perfectly attains all these rewards.

Observing carefully, we will see that there are not many who have all they wish for. Some wealthy employers do not possess great intelligence or wisdom, but have intelligent and wise employees working under them, following their instructions. These intelligent and wise employees have cultivated wisdom in their past lives but did not cultivate good fortune. On the other hand, these employers cultivated good fortune but did not cultivate wisdom. Cause and effect may be complex, but not hard to distinguish. Thus, using Buddhist principles to observe society enables one to know how to conduct oneself in the future.

In reality, true wisdom is more important than good fortune. Wealth is good fortune, but how one uses and allocates wealth requires a high level of wisdom. Without wisdom, possessing wealth may lead one to create infinite bad karma from bad deeds, thinking one is doing good. Without wisdom, one is unable to distinguish true from false, proper from deviated, right from wrong or beneficial from harmful. Often one is ignorant of having conducted oneself in an erroneous manner.

All these principles are explained very clearly in Liao Fan's Four Lessons. Within good and bad there exists true and false, half and full, right and wrong. From its appearance, what may appear to be a true good deed, due to changes in its nature some time later, can turn out to have been a bad one. On the other hand, what may initially appear to be a bad deed can turn out to have been a good one. Therefore, one needs insight to understand the outcome of all good and bad deeds and not to judge them by their initial appearance. One needs a high level of wisdom to understand deeply and to be far-sighted enough to distinguish correctly the truth.

The second principle is "Precept Observation," which also has a broad meaning. One follows the Buddha's teachings, accords with the customs of society, and abides by the rules and laws of a country. In both the spirit of the law as well as the letter, all rules and laws need to be followed.

The third principle is "Patience." Patience includes long-term patience whether interacting with people, matters or objects. As the Buddha explained in the Diamond Sutra, all dharma is attained from patience and endurance. To succeed in either worldly or spiritual dharma, one must have patience. Without it one cannot attain achievement. Having this patience to endure what others cannot, one achieves what others cannot. Only then will one accomplish great deeds.

The fourth principle is "Diligence." Diligence is seeking focused improvement daily, not trying to advance in many different directions. Advancing with diligence to a certain level, one attains concentration. This concentration does not simply mean cultivating while sitting in a lotus position facing a wall. It is to have a firm hold of one's mind and not to be influenced by external conditions. This accords with the Diamond Sutra, to remain unmoved by and unattached to any phenomenon. Not attaching to any phenomenon is to not be enticed by temptations from external influences. One achieves concentration when one is unmoved by all phenomena, such as the advancement of scientific technology, so confusing yet dazzling to our eyes. It is seeing everything clearly and knowing that all is intuitive wisdom, the prajna wisdom. In this way, one will then live happily.

For example, when we buy a refrigerator, use and maintain it nicely, it can last at least ten years. During these ten years, there will be improvements and changes in refrigerator manufacturing. Will we want to exchange it for a new one? When there is no need for a new one and we continue to use it, we have concentration. When we are moved upon seeing a new model in the store and want to buy it to replace the old one, afraid that guests will laugh at the latter's appearance; we have neither concentration nor wisdom. Living in this way, one would not be happy because one's income would slip through one's fingers just trying to keep up with new products. Buddhism calls this Mara, what comes to make one suffer, in this case, to tempt one to spend all their hard-earned money. A truly wise person would be unmoved and live a happy fulfilling life without worries or afflictions, unlike ordinary people.

## **The Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva**

The fifth and last of the guidelines is the Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva. Universal Worthy Bodhisattva is unlike any other Bodhisattva due to his great broadmindedness, where his every thought is of helping all sentient beings. He does not think of himself, his family, country or world but of the infinite universe and beyond, reaching true perfection. With this great broad mind, all that he practices is great.

The order in practicing Buddhism is belief, understanding, practice and attainment. First, one needs to have unwavering belief, for without it one is unable to accept the Buddha's teachings. It is not that easy to instill this belief, as it depends on affinity or condition. In Buddhism, these conditions include good roots, good fortune, merits, virtues and cause. Without these, it would be extremely difficult to have this unwavering belief. In believing, one needs to first believe that one possesses the Buddha nature and that one can definitely become a Buddha. Second, we need to have confidence in our original teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, knowing that he would not lie to us. We also need to believe that what the great masters and Patriarchs have passed down to us is truthful. However, simply believing is not enough.

Equally important is that one seeks the correct and perfect understanding. After understanding, one needs to accomplish, to practice, to apply Buddhist principles, methods and levels of attainment into one's daily living. Lastly, the attainment is to prove within our daily lives that all the teachings and understandings are correct.



Lately, I have heard some fellow practitioners mention that lacking a blessing from an Esoteric Master would seem to make one inferior to others. In reality, are these kinds of blessing all that effective? In America, many fellow practitioners were so enthusiastic about this ritual that they would even drive ten hours or more just to find a Master to obtain a consecration. After they came back, I asked them if they had uncovered their wisdom and had fewer afflictions. They honestly shook their heads and said no. I said, if a consecration is achieved by sprinkling a few drops of water on the head, then one might as well go take a shower to receive a great consecration.

Not understanding the true characteristics and meanings behind all the rituals reveals a very sad phenomenon in Buddhism. Mr. Nian-Chu Huang who was an Esoteric master, stated very clearly in his commentary of the Infinite Life Sutra, "The consecration is a blessing of compassion and kindness; one's head symbolizes the act of instilling in the person the outstanding teachings of the Buddha."

## Chapter five:

### The pure land school

Today, as we practice the Pure Land method, we know that the Infinite Life Sutra is a very important sutra, thus is a supreme Dharma. Passing on the Infinite Life Sutra and the Amitabha Sutra to others brings them a great consecration. Reciting the sutra once is to receive consecration once from all the Buddhas in the ten directions. Reciting the sutra twice is to receive consecration twice from all the Buddhas. Therefore, one needs to understand the method in practicing, to start from the foundation of the Three Conditions.

As I said earlier, the first condition is to be filial and respectful toward parents and teachers; to be compassionate and not kill any living being; and to cultivate the Ten Good Conducts. Cultivation begins from here. If one thinks that one cannot accomplish the above, then no matter how one practices, it is only superficial. It is important for one to practice earnestly to accomplish these conditions or one may not attain the true benefits from the Buddha's teachings.

Ultimately, we return to the Pure Land method. Why? To return to the Pure Land method is what all Buddhas recommend we do. In the Amitabha Sutra, all the Buddhas in the six directions praise the Pure Land. In the Infinite Life Sutra, Buddha Shakyamuni was very clear in praising Buddha Amitabha as the most respected, with the brightest of light, the king of all Buddhas. When returning to and relying upon a Buddha, who would be better than the best? Buddha Shakyamuni did not ask us to return and rely upon himself but rather upon Buddha Amitabha, for he is the ultimate Buddha of all Buddhas.

In the Flower Adornment Sutra, we see that Manjusri and Universal Worthy Bodhisattvas sought birth into the Western Pure Land. If the Western Pure Land were not so remarkable, why would these two Bodhisattvas of the Hwa Dzan world want to go to this particular Pure Land? The Infinite Life Sutra explains why one would want to chant Buddha Amitabha's name and be born into the Pure Land. If one would recite the Infinite Life Sutra more often and listen to lectures on it, one would come to a deeper and more meaningful understanding and cultivation.

If we do not wish to spend more time and energy to seek the truth of life and the universe, then following the teachings within this sutra would be sufficient and perfect. Why? In the future, after we are born into the Pure Land, our wisdom, virtuous abilities and enjoyments will be equal to those of Buddha Amitabha. We will then clearly understand the truth of life and the universe. Thus, as ancient wise people often said, the Pure Land method is a short cut to the ultimate Enlightenment.

Using other methods, we take a long circuitous route to achieve Enlightenment. Seeking birth into the Pure Land is the short cut that ensures us of attaining Enlightenment in one lifetime. From this, we know that this method is outstanding and beyond comparison. All Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and past Patriarchs praised this method. It is a rare opportunity for us to encounter it in this lifetime. As is said in the opening verse of the sutras, "Difficult to encounter in infinite eons." Having encountered it in this lifetime, it would be unbearably sad to let this rarest of opportunities pass us by. It occurs so infrequently in infinite eons, we need to hold on tight, to not let go, to learn and practice it as earnestly and sincerely as we can.

## Volume 3

### **Taking Refuge in the Triple Jewels**

Dear fellow practitioners, today we are going to conduct the Initiation Ceremony of the Triple Jewels, which are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. I would like to clarify what taking refuge in the Triple Jewels means since there have been growing misunderstandings in modern times. In order to reap the true benefits, we must first settle these misunderstandings.

What is Buddhism? Is it a religion? Buddhism is not a religion but rather the most profound and wholesome education based on forty-nine years of Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings for all sentient beings. As I recall, in 1923, Mr. Chin-wu O-Yung spoke at the University of Zhong-Shan. The title of his lecture was "Buddhism is Neither a Religion, nor a Philosophy, but the Essential of the Modern World." This lecture was an insightful breakthrough that shook the contemporary Chinese Buddhist world.

Since Buddhism is an education, what exactly are its objectives, methods and principles? Its educational objective is to help sentient beings understand the truth of the Dharma which is defined as (1) the teachings of the Buddhas (2) duties, laws and doctrines or (3) things, events, phenomena, everything. Simply put, the truth of the Dharma addresses the causes that initiate all the phenomena of life and the universe. Life refers to ourselves while the universe refers to our living environment. Therefore, the educational content of Buddhism directs us to gain clear understanding of our living environment and ourselves.

Nowadays, the formal educational system only subscribes to a partial understanding of the universe, which has yet to be proven. Moreover, we are still discussing and investigating this limited part, not yet knowing enough to draw the correct conclusions. Unfortunately, even religions cannot provide

comprehensive and satisfactory explanations of life as a whole, and are only confined to a limited area of the truth. Therefore, the profound and extensive educational content of Buddhism is essential for every sentient being.

The boundary of our living space is not restricted to a city, a region or even just the planet earth. There are galaxies in outer space, comprised of innumerable planets, on which exist advanced life forms that are much more intelligent than human beings. All these galaxies are also our living environment. Furthermore, apart from the space dimension, there is also a time dimension, which extends from the past through the present and into the future. Thus, the environment in which we live consists of an infinite magnitude of space and time.

Our current formal education does not cover such an extensive discussion of this infinite living space and time. Even the well-respected Confucianism only involves a single lifetime, ranging from birth to death and ultimately to a strong relationship that links us to our ancestors. The teachings of Confucius barely touch on the heavenly beings or ghosts but instead focus on how to behave as an honorable person. In contrast, Buddha Shakyamuni clearly and precisely described the Four Sage Realms, which are Buddha, Bodhisattva, Pratyekabuddha and Sound-hearer. Apart from the Four Sage Realms are the Six Realms of Reincarnation of heavenly beings, Asuras, humans, animals, hungry ghosts and hells. Levels of awakening rank these Four Sage Realms and the Six Realms. For example, Buddhas have the most awakened minds while beings in the hells have the most deluded minds. By combining the Six Realms and the Four Sage Realms, we have the Ten Realms. These comprise our existing living space and it is essential for us to clearly understand them.

After we understand the truth of life and the universe, our thoughts, viewpoints, speech and behavior would naturally differ from before. In the past, our deluded mind and erroneous viewpoints led to incorrect actions, thereby creating bad karma, which is the future retribution resulting from

one's thoughts, speech and action. According to the fundamental Law of Cause and Effect, unavoidable consequences will result from creating karma, as good results come from good karma and bad results come from bad karma. One creates one's own destiny; no one can step in to bear the consequences of our actions.

As we can see, thoroughly understanding the truth of life and the universe will bring us infinite benefits. Once we understand and deeply believe in the Law of Cause and Effect, we will not create any more bad karma. If we do not create any more karma, then we will not have to bear the consequences or fruits, thus achieving what the Buddha frequently referred to in the sutras as surpassing the Ten Realms. From the Cause and Effect point of view, the Four Sage Realms are the results of diligent cultivation and attainment, while the Six Realms are the consequences of good or bad deeds. The Six Realms can be further categorized into the Three Good Realms of humans, Asuras and heavenly beings and the Three Bad Realms of hells, hungry ghosts and animals.

After understanding karma and its consequences, we will refrain from creating any more karma or at least not any bad ones. By applying the above concepts to our daily lives, we will obtain what everyone wishes for: a happy life, pleasant family, successful career, harmonious society, prosperous nation and peaceful world. Only the Buddha's education completely provides the solution to humanity's search for true happiness. Clearly understanding this, we realize that this education is essential for everyone. Since this education encompasses infinite space and time, it surpasses differences in nationality, race, political affiliation and religion. In other words, it is for all sentient beings in the Nine Realms below that of Buddhas.

There are several examples in the sutras about different religious followers who learned the Buddha's teachings during Buddha Shakyamuni's time. The Flower Adornment Sutra and the Earth Store Sutra, tell respectively of a

Hindu priest and a daughter of a Hindu priest who, by adhering to the Buddha's teaching have attained the level of Bodhisattva. From these examples, we understand that the Buddha's education indeed transcends religious beliefs and that any religious followers can benefit from it.

The educational system founded by the Buddha is similar to our contemporary educational system. For example, becoming an Arhat is equivalent to earning a University Bachelor's degree and becoming a Bodhisattva is equivalent to earning a Master's degree. Buddhahood, the highest degree, is equivalent to a Ph.D. Followers of any religion can attain these stages of enlightenment. Is it necessary to abandon one's religion and learn the Buddha's education to obtain enlightenment? Definitely not. If one were to go to school or study abroad to pursue knowledge and advancement, one need not change nationality or religion. In other words, the purpose of studying does not conflict with nationality, religion, etc.

Therefore, Buddhism is an education. Titles such as Arhat, Bodhisattva and Buddha are nothing but "degree" names. Regardless of our differences, we shall achieve these degrees equally as long as we diligently follow the teachings. Thus, the Initiation Ceremony of the Triple Jewels is to formally enroll one into a school where Buddha Shakyamuni teaches the objective, methods and principles of attaining enlightenment.

Since Buddha Shakyamuni established Buddhism, we acknowledge him as our original teacher. Actually, there is only one teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, for all Buddhists. Bodhisattvas such as Manjusri (symbolizing wisdom), Samantabhadra (symbolizing great vows) and Avalokiteshvara (symbolizing compassion) were all the Buddha's earlier students. Today, we too are the Buddha's students. These Bodhisattvas are our schoolmates, seniors who studied before us while we are freshmen. As they are seniors and have the ability to teach us, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Arhats are not objects for worship but rather someone we can respect and learn from.

What is the ultimate goal of the Buddha's education? The sutras teach us that it is Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi. This very important and well-respected phrase is transliterated from Sanskrit in order to keep its original pronunciation. It means the highest, proper and complete enlightenment. Simply said, it can be interpreted as the ultimate, perfect wisdom. Whoever obtains it will be able to intuitively know and sense every aspect of the true reality of life and the universe. Obtaining this wisdom and ability is the ultimate goal of all the Buddha's students.

The Buddha teaches us that the ultimate perfect wisdom is innate. The Avatamsaka (Flower Adornment) Sutra states, "Every being possesses the same wisdom and virtuous capabilities as Buddhas." Why do we not have this wisdom now? It is because of "wandering thoughts and attachments." This statement clearly reveals the two causes of how we temporarily have lost our original capabilities. Wandering thoughts and attachments are not within our basic nature; therefore, they can be discarded. Like dispersing the clouds to let the sun shine through, we remove wandering thoughts and attachments from our mind and cultivate virtue to restore our Buddha Nature, thus completely recovering our innate abilities.

In practice, how do we cultivate? Formally taking refuge in the Triple Jewels is the initial step as it symbolizes asking Venerables, monks or nuns, to pass on ways of Buddhist cultivation. Taking Refuge means to find a shelter that we can return to and rely on or what Buddhists call "Return to the other shore." In practice, from where do we return and upon what do we rely? We return to and rely upon the Triple Jewels of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

In the first step, we return to and rely on the Buddha. "Buddha" is a Sanskrit word meaning awareness and understanding. When we take refuge in the Buddha, we are returning from our deluded state of mind and relying upon an awakened, understanding mind. Participating in the Initiation Ceremony and



accepting the Buddha's teachings are the first steps of the awakening in becoming aware of the importance of learning his education.

The Sixth Patriarch of Zen, Master Hui-Neng, used a different approach in explaining the Triple Jewels. He did not use the words "Buddha, Dharma and Sangha" for fear of promoting misconceptions in the Triple Jewels for future generations. He was afraid that as Buddhism was passed from generation to generation, if he used these words, people would form erroneous views, automatically thinking of a statue for the Buddha Jewel, a sutra for the Dharma Jewel and a Buddhist monk or nun for the Sangha Jewel. These are not what we should return to. Actually, we should take refuge in our Self-Nature Buddha. A Bodhisattva stated, "The Self-Nature Awareness is innate." Therefore, what Buddha Shakyamuni meant in taking refuge in the Buddha is not to seek protection under his wing, but to return from our delusive mind and rely upon the innate Self-Nature Buddha. It is essential for one to understand the importance of returning to one's Self-Nature.

In the second step, we take refuge in the Dharma, returning from deviant views by relying upon proper views and understanding. Dharma is the proper comprehension and viewpoint of life and the universe. The Dharma Jewel is the infinite, innate wisdom of Self-Nature also referred to as the Prajna Wisdom. Relying upon our Prajna Wisdom to correct our erroneous thoughts, speech and behavior is the meaning of taking refuge in the Dharma Jewel. Among the Three Jewels, the Dharma is the primary one we should rely on. In this day and age, Prajna Wisdom will be our primary concern.

However, our innate wisdom cannot be restored in a short time. Then what should we follow? Sutras are records of the Buddha's teachings that describe the truth of the universe. Before our Prajna Wisdom has been fully recovered, we follow the teachings in the sutras and use them as a guideline. If our thinking coincides with the sutras, then our comprehension is correct. For example, the Buddha teaches us to respect and take care of our parents and

teachers, to be compassionate by not killing and to practice the Ten Good Conducts. People may wonder in this modern age why we should be following what the Buddha taught three thousand years ago. We do so because the Self-Nature Prajna Wisdom is everlasting and unchanged; those who obtain it have the capability to know everything in the past, present and future within the infinite universe.

However, we must beware of fraudulent sutras. It is easy for us to encounter fake sutras, especially in a modern world that promotes freedom of publication. Essentially anyone can publish books. In ancient times when sutras first came to China, each sutra had to undergo a strict examination by experts, followed by the emperor's official seal to prove its authenticity. Even the sutra commentaries of ancient patriarchs underwent scrutiny from highly accomplished monks and scholars of that time before receiving the Emperor's approval for distribution. Nowadays, no one regulates or enforces this process. Therefore, we need to be careful in verifying the authenticity of a sutra by checking for its listing in the Dragon (Chien-Long) Canon of the Sutras. This Canon of thirty-eight volumes was compiled under the decree of Emperor Chien-Long in 1738. Previous canons were meticulously certified by the most accomplished monks and scholars of their time and thus also serve as reliable references.

In the third step, we take refuge in the Sangha Jewel. Used here, Sangha does not mean a group of monks or nuns. There are two representations, purity of mind and harmony in life. First, Sangha refers to living in a way that keeps our minds far away from temptations while maintaining the purity of our six senses of sight, sound, taste, smell, touch and mind object. In the modern world, people suffer from pollution of mind, spirit and body. Even the earth's ecological system is off-balance. There are holes in the ozone layers that are "pollution" of the skies. Almost everything from the skies and the earth to their inhabitants are contaminated in one way or another. Today, everyone is aware of environmental pollution. Governments are also

promoting environmental protection to ensure better living conditions. However, how effective are these protection programs? It is questionable. The problem comes back to what the Buddha revealed, that the environment, the dependent variable, changes with our minds, the independent variable. If the impurities in our mind cannot be eradicated, our environment will never reach a state of purity. Therefore, if we want to improve the external environment, we first start internally by purifying our mind. Taking refuge in the third Jewel, the Sangha, thus means returning from pollution and relying upon purity of mind.

Second, the Sangha represents harmony in living. Having observed the sufferings resulting from the disharmony between peoples, countries and even religions, the Buddha taught us the Six Principles of Harmony. The Six Principles are the essential guidelines that all Buddhists need to observe. When we take refuge in the Sangha, we are returning from pollution and disharmony and relying upon Purity of Mind and the Six Principles of Harmony. Thus, the guidelines for cultivation are:

(1) Taking refuge in the Buddha - awareness without delusion,

(2) Taking refuge in the Dharma - proper viewpoints without deviation,

(3) Taking refuge in the Sangha - purity without pollution.

These are the primary disciplines in practicing Buddhism from the beginning of cultivation to the attainment of Buddhahood.

The main purpose behind taking the Three Refuges is to cultivate practicing awakening, proper thoughts and viewpoints, and purity. From now on, if people ask us what we are cultivating, we can answer that we are cultivating the Three Refuges. What are we learning? We are learning to achieve the ultimate, perfect wisdom that comes from perfecting these Three Refuges. What are the methods we use for cultivation? There are innumerable methods available depending on the ability and condition of each individual practitioner. Methods are not fixed, but flexible. However, we must remember that our learning objective always remains the same; awakening, proper thoughts and viewpoints, and purity.

For Pure Land practitioners, the main cultivation method we use is chanting Buddha Amitabha's name. This method is advocated by Mahasthamaprapta (Great Strength) Bodhisattva in the Surangama Sutra and by Samantabhadra (Universal Worthy) Bodhisattva in the Avatamsaka (Flower Adornment) Sutra.

In addition to chanting Buddha Amitabha's name, we follow the Five Guidelines to help us in our daily cultivation. First, we advocate Confucius' Five Virtues of Gentility, Kindness, Respectfulness, Thriftiness and Humility. We use these Five Virtues to cultivate our body and mind. Practicing them provides the foundation for our cultivation. The first level is comprised of the Three Conditions that are described in the Visualization Sutra. The First Condition includes (a) being filial and respectful to one's parents and teachers, (b) being compassionate and not killing any living beings and (c) practicing the Ten Good Conducts. The second Condition includes (a) following the Three Refuges, (b) observing precepts, laws and customs and (c) behaving in a proper and dignified manner. The Third Condition includes (a) generating our Bodhi-Mind, (b) deeply believing in the Law of Cause and Effect, (c) reciting and upholding Mahayana Sutras and (d) encouraging others to advance on the path to Enlightenment. The Buddha told us that the Three Conditions are the causes that brought all the Buddhas of the three times and the ten directions

to Enlightenment. Therefore, we cannot do without this important step in our practice.

Proceeding upward from the Three Conditions, we advance to the second level which is the Six Principles of Harmony. The First Principle of Harmony is to share the same viewpoints or goals. There will be no conflict in the world if we all share the same thoughts and viewpoints. This principle tries to create a common understanding for all sentient beings. This common understanding is based on our Self-Nature and not on Buddha Shakyamuni's opinion. He taught us how to cultivate and explore our own innate wisdom, virtues and capabilities. We are not imitating him; rather we are rediscovering our inborn potential. His education is truly extraordinary.

The second principle is to observe the same precepts. Practicing the precepts includes cultivating an attitude of following society's laws and customs. Once everyone shares the common viewpoints and is able to follow the law, society will be peaceful and prosperous and world peace will naturally ensue.

Another important principle is to share benefits equally. In modern society, it is beneficial not to have a big difference in wealth between people but to try to close the gap between the "have's" and the "have-nots." Equal sharing of wealth consequently settles the conflicts over wealth. Sharing benefits equally with others is a deed of wisdom and a real cultivation of good fortune. The reason people do not have equal wealth comes from the different seeds that they have previously planted. If people did not plant the same seeds, how can they expect to harvest the same fruits? The Buddha taught that those who harvest more should share with those who harvest less. Then, the sharing behavior becomes the seeds that will benefit one more later. According to the Law of Cause and Effect, poor people need to cultivate more good fortune to receive better harvests in the future. In addition, the wealthy need to share their possessions in order to remain wealthy in the future. Only by doing so

will the world become peaceful. This true merit comes from learning the Buddha's teachings.

Pure Land practitioners, as a foundation, cultivate the Confucian Five Virtues that are basic for all humanity. From here, we advance to the Three Conditions and the Six Principles of Harmony that are the important basis before practicing Buddhism. Then the Three Learnings are the foundation before practicing Mahayana Buddhism that includes the Six Paramitas. Finally, we practice the Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra (Universal Worthy) Bodhisattva to attain Buddhahood. It is not difficult to remember these five guidelines. Combining this solid foundation with chanting Buddha Amitabha's name will assure us of obtaining what people have always pursued, a harmonious family life, a successful career and a peaceful society. Now that we have a clear understanding of what we are learning and sincerely want to follow the teachings, we need to practice diligently toward accomplishing our ideal goal. Consequently, one returns and relies on one's Triple Jewels of Self-Nature.

In addition to the abstract form of the Triple Jewels of Self-Nature, there are the physical forms seen as Buddha's images, sutras, monks and nuns. Making offerings to the Buddha's image serves two purposes. First, it honors our original teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni. Every time we look at the image, we remember the great teachings he passed on to us. Second, it is to remind us to emulate the Buddha. When we see the Buddha's image, we remind ourselves to strive for awakening and not to be deluded. Sutras serve the same purpose by reminding us that we have taken refuge in the Dharma and need to reflect upon our viewpoints and comprehension. Similarly, seeing a monk or nun, representing the Sangha, can remind us of the importance of maintaining purity of the six senses and harmony with others. Therefore, attending the physical form of the Triple Jewels greatly benefits us because they constantly remind us of the path to awakening.

Some practitioners attend the physical forms of the Triple Jewels at home. The Buddha's image symbolizes the Buddha Jewel while the Bodhisattva's image represents the Sangha Jewel. When we honor the Three Sages of the Western Pure Land, Buddha Amitabha symbolizes the Buddha Jewel, and Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattvas symbolize the Sangha Jewel. Furthermore, Buddhist sutras symbolize the Dharma Jewel. These three remind us of the treasures of Self-Nature within us.

Of all the Buddhist sutras, the Infinite Life Sutra is what I recommend the most. Although not too lengthy, the text completely encompasses the Buddha's teachings. Thus, it is well suited to modern practitioners. The full title of this sutra is The Buddha Speaks of the Infinite Life Sutra of Adornment, Purity, Equality and Enlightenment of the Mahayana School. This title fully reveals the objectives, principles and methods of cultivation in the Buddha's teachings. "Infinite Life" in this sutra's title embodies the most important of all the other infinities, including infinite wisdom, abilities, virtues, wealth, etc. Without infinite life, one could not enjoy all these other infinities. The infinity of our natural potential is what Pure Land practitioners seek and the virtues and capabilities of our innate Self-Nature are infinite. Furthermore, infinite Dharma originates from Self-Nature. Thus, the immeasurable unbounded existences of the Ten Realms are created by the Self-Nature.

The word "Adornment" in the sutra's title represents truth, goodness, beauty and wisdom, qualities that are not a true reality in this world. They exist within the Self-Nature and will be found when one seeks within.

The principles of cultivation are also expressed by "Purity, Equality and Enlightenment." Purity represents the Buddha Jewel; Equality represents the Dharma Jewel; and Enlightenment represents the Buddha Jewel. These three concepts are also equivalent to the Three Learnings, and cover the Buddha's forty-nine years of teachings. Purity stands for self-discipline and the Vinayas

(Precepts); Equality stands for the Concentration and the Sutras; Enlightenment stands for the Wisdom and the Sastras (Commentaries).

If we have a busy lifestyle and do not have time to study numerous Buddhist sutras, we can start from this Infinite Life Sutra. Once thoroughly understanding it, not only will one understand Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings but also the teachings of all the Buddhas, because all these teachings come from the Self-Nature.

The Buddha Speaks of the Infinite Life Sutra of Adornment, Purity, Equality, and Enlightenment of the Mahayana School expresses the essence of all sutras. Practicing according to the teachings in this sutra fulfills the requirements of taking refuge in the Triple Jewels!

Today, I have explained to everyone the meaning of taking the Three Refuges. We will begin the Three Refuges Ceremony by sincerely and respectfully repeating the oath three times in front of the Buddha, vowing to be willing to become Buddha's student and to learn from him. I, Venerable Chin-Kung, will be the witness and initiation teacher. Please remember that one does not take refuge in the monk conducting the ceremony, but rather in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, thus becoming students of the Triple Jewels.

The following is a simple yet solemn initiation ceremony. Everyone will receive a certificate of the initiation with an oath extracted from the Book of the Precepts by Dharma Master Hong-I. We use it for commemoration and simplicity. Let us stand in front of the Buddha's and Bodhisattva's images with our most sincere, pure, compassionate and respectful heart. Repeat after me, "I solemnly pledge to be a student of the Triple Jewels. From now on, I will cultivate according to the Buddha's teachings, will seek rebirth into the Pure Land and will help all other sentient beings to understand the truth of the Dharma."



## **What is Taking Refuge?**

Taking Refuge means to return and rely. From where do we return from and upon what do we rely? When we take refuge in the Buddha, we are returning from our deluded state of mind and relying upon an Awakened, Understanding mind. When we take refuge in the Dharma, we are returning from deviant views and relying upon proper views and understanding. When we take refuge in the Sangha, we are returning from pollution and disharmony and relying upon Purity of Mind and the Six Principles of Harmony. Taking refuge in the Triple Jewels restores the complete wisdom and abilities of our Self-Nature. We will attain purity, equality, honesty, contentment, compassion and overall, true happiness.

## **The Buddha Jewel**

Buddha is a Sanskrit word meaning Awareness and Understanding. When we take refuge in the Buddha, we vow to return from blind faith and delusion and rely upon Understanding and Awareness as a way of life. We are not relying upon the statues or Buddha-images, but rather the spirit of understanding and awareness they represent.

As students of the Pure Land Teachings, we learn to rely upon Buddha Amitabha's lessons on wisdom and compassion. The name "Amitabha" stands for Infinite Light and Infinite Life. When we follow his teachings, we will attain wisdom, happiness and longevity.

This is taking refuge in the Buddha.

## **The Dharma Jewel**

Dharma means Right Understanding and Views. Delusion has obstructed us from seeing the true face of people and the reality behind matters and objects. This has caused us to look at life and the universe in a distorted and deviant way. When delusion is cleared and our minds are pure to an extent, we give rise to wisdom. With wisdom, we are able to see all people and matters completely and clearly. When our hearts are pure, we can see the past, present and future. Only when we have clearly seen the whole can our viewpoint and understanding be considered right.

The Buddha's mind is pure without the slightest pollution and therefore sees everything clearly and entirely. We can rely upon the sutras, which are the recorded teachings of the Buddha, because they speak entirely of the truths the Buddha has seen. They teach and show us the way to attain Purity of Mind, to see life and the universe most clearly and become just like the Buddhas.

As students of the Pure Land Teachings, we should rely upon the five Sutras and one commentary of the Pure Land as guidelines of practice:

1. The Buddha Speaks of the Infinite Life Sutra of Adornment, Purity, Equality and Enlightenment of the Mahayana School.
2. The Amitabha Sutra
3. The Visualization Sutra
4. "The Chapter of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's Conduct and Vows," from the Flower Adornment Sutra
5. "The Chapter on the Foremost Attainment of Great Strength Bodhisattva through Buddha Recitation," from the Surangama Sutra
6. "Vasubandhu Bodhisattva's Report on the Way to Reaching the Pure Land."

This is taking refuge in the Dharma.

## The Sangha Jewel

Sangha means purity and harmony. Today's world is full of pollution; pollution of mind, spirit, views and body. Even the earth and atmosphere are hazardly polluted. The Buddha taught, "The environment changes according to our state of mind." We would do well to return from all these pollutants and rely upon Purity of Mind, for it is the key to saving our Earth.

There is also great disharmony in our world today, among spouses, families, friends, societies and countries which has brought us much suffering and many disasters. The Buddha taught us to rely upon the Six Principles of Living in Harmony to establish harmonious relationships between others and ourselves.

As students of the Pure Land Teachings, we rely upon wisdom and compassion as our way of treating others and dealing with affairs. Great Strength Bodhisattva represents wisdom. His choice of the Buddha Recitation method of practice is wisdom in its highest form. Guan Yin Bodhisattva represents compassion; when we help introduce the Pure Land Teachings to others, we are practicing the compassion of Guan Yin Bodhisattva.

This is taking refuge in the Sangha.

To the Buddha I return and rely, returning from delusions and relying upon Awareness and Understanding.

To the Dharma I return and rely, returning from erroneous views and relying upon Proper Views and Understanding.

To the Sangha I return and rely, returning from pollution and disharmony and relying upon Purity of Mind and the Six Principles of Harmony.

# Volume 4

## **THE ART OF LIVING**

### **HOUSTON, TEXAS**

#### **CHAPTER ONE**

##### **THE EDUCATION OF BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI,**

##### **OUR ORIGINAL TEACHER**

“Education – The field of study concerned with teaching and learning.”

-THE AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY

Buddhism is an education about our living environment and us. The Buddha teaches us to recognise ourselves; our thought, speech, and actions and the consequences they evoke. Most importantly, the Buddha wants us to restore our original and complete wisdom. He teaches that everyone possesses the ability to attain complete understanding of life and the universe, and it is only because of delusion that we are unable to realize it. We are blinded by discrimination, wandering thoughts and attachments, and forget the original pure mind of our self-nature. In this way, we have caused ourselves much unneeded suffering.

The Buddha also teaches us to view our environment clearly. Environment refers to the people, matters, and objects we come across everyday. When our hearts are free from discriminatory thoughts and attachments, we will be able to view everything clearly and deal with them appropriately. Thus, we can live in harmony with others and succeed in all our endeavours.

What did the Buddha mean when he taught us to cultivate? His intent was mainly to rid us of our delusions and attachments. If we drew together the Six Principles of practice taught by the Buddha, we would only end up with the practice of giving. Giving simply means to let go. If we can let go of our greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance, then we would always dwell in purity of mind. If we can let go of all discriminations, worries and attachments, then we would attain peace, spiritual liberation, health and longevity. If we can let go of our own views and work together for the benefit of others, then we can achieve harmony with others, harmony in society, and ultimately, world peace. From this, we can see that the main practice of the Buddha's teaching is none other than giving.

When Buddha Shakyamuni was in the world, he not only used words to teach, but made an example of himself for all living beings to follow. He let go of all desires, worldly enjoyments, fame and wealth to lead the life of a left-home person. He lived a life of simplicity, purity of mind and body, and happiness. Ordinary people might see this as bitter and miserable, but this is only due to their lack of understanding. One with wisdom would view things differently. The wise would see the Buddha's life as one of true liberation, happiness and fulfilment. The Buddha does not have useless thoughts, discriminations, attachments, or worries. How at ease he is! He accords with all conditions and emanates wisdom in every thought and action to teach sentient beings in this world.

The Buddha lives with wisdom, while ordinary people live lives of affliction. Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings show us how to change afflicted lives into

ones of great wisdom. From these teachers, we will learn how to restore the ultimate and complete wisdom and abilities of our self-nature; allowing us to attain true happiness and prosperity. This, is the Buddha's Education.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE FOUR KINDS OF BUDDHISM TODAY**

In our world today, there are at least four different types of Buddhism. The first is the authentic Buddhism, the education of understanding the true reality of life and the universe originally taught by Buddha Shakyamuni. Unfortunately, the authentic education is rare and difficult to encounter nowadays. The remaining types of Buddhism are more or less distortions of the original teachings.

The second type is the religious Buddhism. Originally, Buddhism was not a religion, but now it has become one. We can no longer deny that there is a Buddhist religion because everywhere we look, especially in Asia, it is displayed as a religion. Unlike the monasteries in the past, which held eight-hour classes per day and provided another eight hours for self-cultivation, today's Buddhist temples no longer uphold such a perseverance of the Buddha's Teachings. Today we mainly see people making offerings to the Buddha statues and praying for blessings and fortune. In this way, Buddhism has been wrongly changed into a religion.

The third type of Buddhism is the philosophical study of the Buddha's teachings. Many universities today offer courses on the study of Buddhist

Sutras, considering the teaching as a philosophy. The content of the Buddha's education is actually a complete university of knowledge and wisdom. Philosophy is only one of its courses. Just as it is wrong to recognize a university as a single course, it is also inappropriate to think of and limit the Buddha's education to only a philosophy. The Buddha's education can help us resolve our problems – from family difficulties to the great issue of life and death. The Buddha's teachings are profound and vast, and teach us the truths of life and the universe. It should not be mistaken as only a philosophy.

The fourth type of Buddhism we see in our world today is the deviant and externalist Buddhism. This is an extremely unfortunate distortion, which only came to be in the past thirty to forty years. Religious Buddhism persuades people to be decent and philosophical Buddhism pursues truth, neither cause much harm to society. However, if Buddhism is changed into a deviant and externalist path, using the weakness of human nature to cheat and harm living beings, disturbing the peace and safety of society, then this conversion has gone too far. The speech and actions of these deviant and external paths can be very attractive and enticing. One should be very careful as not to be misled by these deviant ways or regretting it would be too late.

These four types of Buddhism exist in our society today, we should recognize them for what they are and think carefully as to which way is most beneficial to us and the one we will ultimately follow.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE ART OF LIVING / SELECTED PASSAGES**



Our goal in studying Buddhism is to open up our wisdom; to attain this goal, we cultivate purity of mind. In today's society, our greatest obstacles are TV, radio, newspapers and magazines – these all contain contents that can pollute our minds. I often persuade people not to read or listen to these things. When our hearts are free from these unneeded afflictions, we can live every day in peace and happiness; thus, allowing our minds to return to purity. With an undeluded mind, one will see matters of life clearer, more deeply and farther than others. This is because a settled and concentrated mind is a mind of wisdom. The key in cultivating the Buddha's teachings is having a settled and concentrated mind. In practicing the Pure Land method, purity of mind is a foremost importance.

The Infinite Life Sutra teaches us to cultivate purity, equality and enlightenment. Being mindful of the Buddha is cultivating the above, for Buddha Amitabha is purity, equality, and enlightenment. When we recite the Buddha's name, we are reminded of these qualities.

In China, Buddhism can be divided into ten schools, Aside from the two Small Vehicle schools, which have already declined, the eight remaining schools belong to the Great Vehicle. Two schools (Zen and Shing) enter the Buddha's teachings through the method of "Enlightenment". They seek the great enlightenment, to understand the heart/mind and uncover the self-nature. Usually, those of lesser capabilities to become enlightened on their own have much difficulty in reaching their goals through this method. Thus, to cultivate the Zen School requires a high level of wisdom, ability and a considerably pure mind. Without these, one would have to start learning from the basis of Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings.

The study of these teachings is to help establish proper understanding and viewpoints; thus, the method of "Proper Views and Knowledge" is used here to enter the Buddha's teachings. There are four schools in this category (Tian Tai, Shian Shou, Fa Shiang and San Lwun) The practitioners of these schools study

and follow the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni to correct their erroneous views, thoughts, and actions. Most people are capable of learning this method, but it is a long journey, such as going to school. One must start from elementary school, then gradually advance grade by grade to junior high, high school, and college. In finishing one grade, one attains, the benefit of that single grade. The final two schools are the Pure Land and the Esoteric. These stress the importance of cultivating purity of mind; thus, their method of practicing the Buddha's teachings is through purity. People of all capabilities, regardless of whether they are intelligent or less able can practice the Pure Land School. All can practice and succeed in cultivating Pure Land method. On the other hand, the Esoteric School requires a high level of purity of mind, making it very difficult to reach attainment.

The difference between the cultivation of purity in the Pure Land School and the Esoteric School is that the Pure Land School teaches us to cultivate purity of mind away from pollution, while the Esoteric School teaches us to cultivate purity of mind in the midst of pollution. The latter involves a state of being immersed in pollution but not being contaminated; naturally, this state is too difficult for most people to attain.

True wisdom arises from purity of mind, thus, the wisdom spoken of in the Buddha's teachings is not attained from reading and studying books; the wisdom we attain from reading and studying is only worldly knowledge and not true wisdom.

True wisdom is the function of our self-nature. Our self-nature is complete with infinite wisdom, virtues and abilities; qualities that are present in everyone's self-nature and we need to know how to bring them out.

“Buddha” is Purity, Equality and Enlightenment. The Buddha's teachings can be summarized into ten simple phrases:

## **True Sincerity**

towards others.

## **Purity of mind**

within,

## **Equality**

in everything we see.

## **Proper Understanding**

of life and the universe,

## **Compassion**

in helping others in a wise, unemotional and unconditional way,

## **See through**

to the truth of impermanence,

## **Let go**

of all wandering thoughts and attachments,

## **Attain Freedom**

of mind and spirit,

## **Accord With Conditions**

to go along with the situation,

## **Be Mindful of Buddha Amitabha**

Following his teachings and vowing to be born into the Pure Land.

The first five represent the Buddha's heart and the virtues of our self-nature. Presently we are unable to completely manifest these qualities due to our lack of cultivating the latter five. Diligent practice is needed to bring out these virtues of the Buddha-nature within us.

The ultimate goal in learning Buddhism is the great Perfection. In all walks of life, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas act as role models for all people to follow. Students of the Buddha can be good examples of all others. Families that follow the Buddha's teachings can behave in a way that is worthy of being the role model for all families. If one is still a student, then one's schoolwork, conduct and health become an example for one's classmates. This is being a student of the Buddha. In going to work or running a business, one can be a role model for all businesspersons to follow. Thus, everything in the Buddhadharama can be number one. A family dwelling in perfect wisdom is the most content, fortunate and happy family in the world.

Buddhism is the education of wisdom; it encompasses all things and exceeds the boundaries between countries, races and religions. Since Buddhism is an education, followers of all religions are welcome and can learn and cultivate this education of true wisdom.

In the Visualization Sutra, the Three Conditions are the foundation of cultivation in Buddhism. Upon perfecting the Three Conditions, one will have complete wisdom, fortune and virtue.

The first condition consists of four practices based on the fundamental moral of humankind:

- 1) Being filial to our parents,
- 2) Respecting teachings and elders,
- 3) Being compassionate and not killing an living being and
- 4) Following the Ten Good Conducts.

The second condition consists of three practices based on cultivating the self:

- 5) Taking Refuge in the Triple Jewels,
- 6) Abiding by precepts, rules and customs,
- 7) Conducting ourselves in a proper and dignified manner.

The third condition consists of four practices, which follow the practices of Bodhisattvas:

- 8) Generating the Bodhi mind,
- 9) Deeply believing in the Law of Cause and Effect,
- 10) Reciting and upholding the Mahayana sutras and
- 11) Encouraging others on the path to Enlightenment.

Altogether, these eleven practices, each having its profound and vast meaning, needs to be put into use in everyday life, for they are the foundation of the forty-nine years of teachings given by Buddha Shakyamuni.

Great Vehicle Buddhism in China can be represented by the great Bodhisattvas of the Four Famous Mountains. First is Earth Treasure Bodhisattva of Jiuhua Mountain representing filial piety and respect. Second is Guan Yin (Great Compassion) Bodhisattva of Putuo Mountain, representing compassion. Third is Manjushri Bodhisattva of Wutai Mountain, representing wisdom. Fourth is Universal Worthy Bodhisattva of Emei Mountain, representing true practice. These four great Bodhisattvas represent the core of cultivation. As beginners, we start learning from Earth Treasure, for the earth is the root of life of all living beings. Because the great earth nurtures all beings and is the treasury of all that is precious, the Buddha uses it to represent our “mind ground” or “mind earth”. Our true mind/original nature is complete with infinite wisdom, virtuous abilities and talents; we must know how to open this treasury in order to attain its benefits. Earth Treasure Bodhisattva teaches us to be filial to our parents and respectful to our teachers, for in these practices lies the key to opening the treasury of our self-nature.

The field of filial piety is vast. Our parents have shown us great kindness in bringing us up and in educating us, therefore, we should not only nurture their aging bodies, but we should also nurture their spiritual well-being and minds thus helping them to be happy; this is practicing filial piety.

Regarding the practice of filial piety, we should strive to do our best in living up to our parent's expectations. When they wish us to be good persons and the benefit society, we should do so; to act otherwise would be unfilial. For children going to school, it would be unfilial to do poorly in schoolwork, causing one's parents to be worried and disappointed. It would be unfilial if one's conduct was poor, of it one's health was poor, or if one was disrespectful to one's teachers or could not get long with others. After reaching adulthood and entering society, it would be unfilial to be rebellious towards one's boss or unable to cooperate with co-workers, causing one's parents to worry. From these, we realize how vast the field of cultivating filial piety really is, and that the entire Buddhadharma is actually just teaching the Way of Filial Piety. In Buddhism, the perfection of filial piety is only completed upon reaching Unsurpassed Enlightenment of Buddhahood.

Nowadays, humankind has been seriously polluted in heart, thoughts, views, spirit and body, thus leading to the appearance of many strange illnesses. The root cause of illness and disease is pollution; if one's body and mind are pure one will not fall ill or grow old. To not become ill or grow old is true happiness and good fortune. To attain this goal, we only need to learn and cultivate according to the Buddha's teachings.

In our world today, where foods have been polluted by poisons, we should harbour compassion, for compassion is the antidote for all poisons. A truly compassionate heart can neutralize all poisons. The Buddha once said, "All dharmas arise from the mind." Thus, a pure, equal and enlightened mind/heart naturally brings health to one's body.

When we recite morning and evening ceremonies in front of the Buddha and Bodhisattva images, it is just as if we were vowing to abide by their teachings right in their presence. Morning recitation acts as a reminder, preventing us from forgetting the Buddha's teachings, and reminding us to act accordingly in the course of the day. Evening recitation is a reflection of the day's practice, checking to see if we acted according to the Buddha's teachings. If we did, then we can work even harder next time, if not, then we need to reform, seeking to renew ourselves each day. Only by practicing in this way can true benefits be attained. Morning and evening recitations are the most basic practices in learning Buddhism. It is necessary to remind ourselves each day and reflect and reform.

One who wishes to become a student of the Buddha should first learn from Maitreya Bodhisattva, better known in America as "The Happy Buddha." Maitreya Bodhisattva represents the most basic conditions necessary to become a Buddhist - a smiling face and a big heart, represented by his big belly. All the Buddha images serve to remind us of the teachings and are not idols or gods of worship. "The Happy Buddha" teaches us to give rise to a non-discriminating mind and to be happy; thus being able to enter the Buddha Way.

The content of the Buddha's teachings is infinitely profound and vast; one is unable to speak of it all, for the essence of it is unfathomable. Understanding it can bring great help to our living, work and interacting with all people, matters and affairs. Buddhism truly surpasses the boundaries of nationality, race and religion – it encompasses everything. The Buddha's teaching is truly a perfectly complete education.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**



## **TAKING REFUGE IN THE TRIPLE JEWEL**

Taking Refuge means to return and rely. When we take refuge in the Buddha, we are returning from our deluded state of mind and relying upon an Awakened, Enlightened Mind. When we take refuge in the Dharma, we are returning from deviant views and relying upon proper views and understanding. When we take refuge in the Sangha, we are returning from pollution and disharmony and relying upon Purity of Mind and the Six Principles of Living in Harmony. Taking refuge in the Triple Jewels restores the complete wisdom and abilities of our Self-Nature. We will attain Purity, Equality, Honest, Freedom, Compassion and overall, True Happiness.

### **The Buddha Jewel**

Buddha is a Sanskrit meaning Awareness and Enlightenment. When we take refuge in the Buddha, we vow to return from blind faith and delusion and rely upon Understanding and Awareness as a way of life. Images of the Buddha serve as a reminder for us to practice awareness and understanding, and are not objects of worship. Prostrating and showing respect towards these images are only ways to counter arrogance and cultivate humility. This is taking refuge in the Buddha.

### **The Dharma Jewel**

Dharma means Proper Understanding and Views. Delusion has obstructed us from seeing the true face of people and the reality behind matters and objects. This has caused us to look at life and the universe in a distorted and deviant way. When delusion is cleared and our minds are pure to an extent, we give rise to wisdom. With wisdom, we are able to see all people and matters completely and clearly. When our hearts are pure, we can see the past, present and future. Only when we have clearly seen the Whole can our viewpoint and Understanding be considered Proper.

The Buddha's mind is pure without the slightest pollution and therefore sees everything clearly and entirely. We can rely upon the Sutras, recorded teachings of the Buddha, because they speak entirely of the truths the Buddha has seen. They teach and show us the way to attain Purity of Mind, to see life and the universe most clearly, and become just like the Buddhas. When we encounter sutras, we should immediately forth a mind of respect and remind ourselves to cultivate Right Understanding and Views. This is taking refuge in the Dharma.

### The Sangha Jewel

Sangha means purity and harmony. Today's world is filled with pollution; pollution of mind, spirit, views and body. Even the earth and the atmosphere are hazardly polluted. The Buddha taught, "The environment changes according to the mind." We should return from all these pollution and rely upon purity of mind. Purity of mind is the key to saving our Earth.

There is also great disharmony in our world today, among spouses, families, friends, societies and countries which has brought us much suffering and

many disasters. The Buddha taught us to rely upon the Six Principles of Living in Harmony to establish harmonious relationships between others and ourselves.

Sangha also refers to a group of four or more persons who practice the Buddha's teachings and abide by the Six Principles of Living in Harmony. This includes the life-home people we may encounter. When we see left-home people, we should immediately give rise to a mind of purity and harmony. This is taking refuge in the Sangha.

## **THE THREE REFUGES**

To the Buddha I return and rely,

returning from delusions and

relying upon

Awareness and Understanding.

To the Dharma I return and rely,

returning from erroneous views and

relying upon

Proper Views and Understanding.

To The Sangha I return and rely,

returning from pollution and disharmony

and relying upon

Purity of Mind and the

Six Principles of Harmony.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **HOW HOMEMAKERS CAN CULTIVATE THE BODHISATTVA WAY IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

It must be very tiresome to do the same kind of work everyday, and especially for homemakers. It seems as if one cannot be free from household chores for a single day, and many are greatly troubled by their duties. However, if we can learn to change our way of looking at things, we will be able to perform our chores with great joy.

Much of the problem is that ordinary people are very much attached to the “self”. They think, “*I* am doing all this work; poor me, *I* am so tired; why should *I* do this for the?” The more they think this way, the more afflicted they become. If we were to learn the Bodhisattva Way, the Way of Understanding and Enlightenment, and vow to universally help all living beings, then our viewpoint would be much different.

In following the Bodhisattva Path, the first thing we learn is the Practice of Giving. By serving the family at home, the homemaker Bodhisattva is already cultivating Giving. Giving includes the Giving of Wealth, the Giving of Teaching and the Giving of Fearlessness. The Giving of Wealth can be divided into outer wealth and inner wealth. For example, outer wealth refers to making money for our family and providing the means for living. Inner wealth refers to using our physical energy and wisdom to support our family. So, the practice of giving can be completed perfectly at home.

When we do our housework with care and organize our home to be clean and neat, this is bringing comfort to the family and admiration from our neighbours; this is cultivating the Practice of Precept Observation. Abiding by precepts simply means abiding by rules – rules of the country, society and family, and doing everything in an organized and proper way. Endurance in doing our chores without complaint or fatigue is cultivating the Practice of Patience. In seeking improvement everyday, hoping that tomorrow’s attainment will exceed that of today’s, is cultivating the Practice of Diligence. In performing one’s various duties daily but still maintaining a pure and undeluded heart, is cultivating the Practice of Concentration in Purity of Mind, being apart from discriminating thoughts and attachments. From within purity of mind, one will give rise to wisdom, and will be filled with inner peace and happiness, this is cultivating the Practice of Wisdom. Thus, with true understanding, we will discover that these Six Principles Cultivated by Bodhisattvas (Giving, Precepts Observation, Patience, Diligence,

Concentration in Purity of Mind and Wisdom) can be practiced to perfection in the everyday acts of dusting, sweeping, washing and cooking.

Once we have performed our duties well, we become role models for homemakers all over the world and an example for all families to follow. Thus, not only can we help our neighbours, but extended, we can influence society, the country, and even the world in a positive way. From this we come to see that in dusting, sweeping, washing, and cooking, a homemaker Bodhisattva is actually carrying out the great vow of helping all living beings. This is truly being a student of the Buddha. So, if we can contemplate our duties as described above, we will be filled with peace and happiness in our work. How then could anything trouble us?

The most important factor in learning and cultivating the Buddha's teachings is that one be able to practice them in everyday life. Understanding this, we would be able to practice the Six Principles Cultivated by Bodhisattvas at our work and office. A Bodhisattva, in all walks of life, whether appearing as a man, woman, elder, or child, cultivates by living up to his/her own responsibilities. Cultivation and living are one – this is the life of enlightened beings.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SELECTED PASSAGES FROM LIVING BUDDHISM**

- Buddhism is an education, not a religion. We do not worship the Buddha, we respect him as a teacher. His teachings enable us to leave suffering and attain true happiness.

- It is best to treat all people with respect and sincerity, being responsible for our actions and careful when handling other's property. Be conservative with speech and actions to avoid harming others.

- It is best to show our gratitude to those who have shown us kindness, such as parents, teachers and even society. Everyone in the society is interdependent and inter-related; we can practice good deeds to repay them.

- How many people recognize the kindness shown by parents? Usually, people do not realize until they themselves become parents or lose their parents. We can show our gratitude through practicing filial piety by being responsible, considerate and compliant to our parents.

- To be a poor, content, and happy person is better than being one who is rich, worried, and afflicted with greed.

- Buddhism is a teaching, which shows us how to live a happy, fulfilling, and content life.

- True love is indiscriminating, unattaching, and unconditional; we can share this love with all beings. This is called compassion.

- If we wish to bring peace to the world, we need to start by changing our erroneous ways. World peace stems from inner peace.

- Our goal in studying the Buddha's teachings and cultivation is to attain complete understanding of life and the universe.

- Be considerate and kind in your speech. To put down another person is only proving your own arrogance and lack of self-confidence to others.

- Life is short and fragile, why not cultivate kindness instead of committing acts which cause harm to living beings and oneself?

- Cultivating virtue is to keep a kind heart, speak kind words and do kind acts to benefit others.

- Wise persons do not harbour feelings of gain or loss. In this way, they constantly dwell in the joy of possessing great peace of mind.

- The point of practicing giving and charity is to forsake greed, hatred, ignorance, and arrogance.



- When helping others, we should think about benefiting the entire society or even the world instead of limiting our help to just the ones we love. Expanding the boundaries of our care for others makes our lives more meaningful, full of freedom and happiness.

- The Buddha's teachings are a teaching of wisdom. Living Buddhism is to fill our lives with utmost wisdom and happiness.

- In all circumstances, we must first reflect upon ourselves. Confucius once said, "Do not give to others what you yourself do not desire". This is teaching us to keep a humane and sincere heart. If we want others to smile at us, we must first smile at others. In dealing with matters, we must not speak personal gain but should work for the public welfare.

A true cultivator does not see the faults of others. When we think of others' faults, it becomes our own affliction. Everyone has their good and bad sides, but we must learn to look at the good points of others and strive to respect all beings

## **Volume V**

### **THE IMMUTABILITY OF CAUSE AND EFFECT**

by Venerable Wu Lin

Respected Dharma Masters, respected practitioners and guests. Over the past few hundred years, the face of Buddhism has undergone several changes. First, it began to be regarded by some as a religion. Then, it was looked upon as a philosophy. Some even twisted it almost beyond recognition until it became more of a cult. And recently it has come to be portrayed by some as a show.

Some of these misunderstandings have been honest ones, often occurring as people have tried to understand and respect the teachings. Some of these misunderstandings occurred as people strove to benefit themselves at the expense of others. If we want to really understand and benefit from Buddhism, we need to go back to its original form.

Approximately two thousand years ago, in 67 AD, Buddhism officially came to China and since then, has spread and flourished throughout the country. The Emperor had sent special envoys to India to invite Buddhist monks to come to China to teach Buddhism, which at that time was understood to be an education.

The sutras, recorded teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni, address him as our “Original Teacher”. Those who listened to him were called students, which is what we call ourselves today. This teacher-student relationship is only found in education. Another reason that Buddhism is an education is also to be found in the sutras, where we learn that the students would ask questions of the Buddha, who would then answer them. If the students did not thoroughly

understand, or thought that we would not thoroughly understand, they would ask for further clarification, which the Buddha would provide. This is essentially a classroom discussion. Please understand that Buddha Shakyamuni simply taught. He conducted neither ceremonies or rites.

Buddhism is Buddha Shakyamuni's educational system, which is similar to that of Confucius for both presented similar viewpoints and methods. The goal of Buddhist education is to attain wisdom. In Sanskrit, the language of ancient India, this wisdom was called "Anuttara-smyak-sambhodi" meaning the perfect complete wisdom. The Buddha taught us that the main objective of our learning and cultivation is to achieve this ultimate wisdom.

He further taught us that everyone has the potential to realize this state of ultimate wisdom, because it is an intrinsic part of our nature. It is not something we can obtain externally. However, most of us have become confused through general misconceptions and therefore, are unable to realize this potential. However, if we can break through this confusion, we will realize this intrinsic part of our nature. Thus, Buddhism is an educational system aimed at regaining our own original, intrinsic self-nature.

It also teaches absolute equality, which stemmed from the Buddha's recognition that all sentient beings possess this innate wisdom and nature. Therefore, there really is no inherent difference among beings. Everyone is different now because we have lost our true nature and have become confused. The degree of wisdom exhibited by individuals depends on the degree of delusion and has nothing to do with the original true nature of the individual. The Buddha's teachings help us to realize this innate, perfect, ultimate wisdom. With this wisdom, we can solve all of our problems and turn our suffering into happiness.

Due to our lack of wisdom, we perceive and behave foolishly, and thus suffer the consequences evoked by our incorrect thoughts, speech and behaviour. If

we have wisdom, our thoughts, speech and behaviour will be correct; how then can we suffer where there are no ill consequences to suffer from? Of course, we will be happy. From here, we can see that suffering is caused by our delusion and the source of happiness is our own realization of wisdom.

The Buddha's educational system can also be witnessed today in lecture hall, in which we can see many teaching aids. When we enter the hall or classroom, we see the image of a Buddha, which symbolizes our original self-nature. We may see a container of water on the Buddha table. The clear water symbolizes the principle that our minds need to be as pure as the water; to be void of greed, anger and ignorance. It is calm without a single ripple indicating that we interact with people and matters with the serene and non-discriminating mind of equality. Furthermore, it is pure and calm, reflecting clearly and thoroughly just as we would see everything around us in a mirror.

Offerings of flowers symbolize the cause as the blossoms result in the bearing of fruit, reminding us that there are consequences to our every thought, word and action. Lamps or candles symbolize wisdom and brightness illuminating the darkness of our ignorance. The images of lotus flowers symbolize transcending the ten realms of existence. First, it rises through the mud at the bottom of the pond, which symbolizes the six realms of birth and death. Then it rises through the water, which symbolizes the four sage realms. Finally, it breaks through the surface of the water completely transcending the ten realms, reaching the one true Dharma realm, the stage of ultimate enlightenment.

The lotus flower teaches us that although we live in the world, we should not become polluted by our surroundings. The lotus flower above the water symbolizes that one day, all beings, from those in the hell realms to those who are Bodhisattvas, will become Buddha's; beings with perfect complete enlightenment. The Buddha realm exceeds the ten realms and to become a Buddha is the ultimate goal of our teachings. So, when we see the lotus flower,

we are reminded to practice the teachings as well as to transcend the ten realms.

Today, when we see images of Buddha Shakyamuni, we are reminded that we need to feel gratitude for his forty-nine years of teaching. The Buddha, a voluntary social educator, dedicated his whole life to teaching us how to cut off our afflictions to attain perfect complete wisdom and true happiness. He was an ordinary person who saw the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death, but did not know how to solve these problems. He was deluded but became awakened. He learned, through cultivation, the truth of life and the universe and then taught us how to become awakened by using himself as an example so that we could learn from his experiences. So, that we too can become awakened and thus live happy and fulfilling lives.

In the world today there are many beliefs, religions and cultures, many different viewpoints of how to explain our world and our relationship to it. But although we seem to have so many differences, we really have so many similarities. Do not kill, do not steal, do not lie. Do all that is good and nothing that is bad. Do unto others as you would have done unto you. Remember the kindness of others and repay the kindness with gratitude.

Whether we call it caring for and respecting others or loving kindness or compassion, we believe in helping others, in giving of what we have or who we are, to those who need our help or our wisdom. Today, many people are searching for wisdom, for the understanding of why we are born, why we live and why we die. We are compelled by conflicting emotions. We are compelled by logic. When we hear of other beliefs the feelings of many people range from fear to curiosity, from surprise to fascination, from suspicion to cooperation.

Everywhere we look we see societies with greater diverse cultures, societies with more differences, societies that often emphasize these differences. Today many people look outside of themselves, to these differences, believing that

they are the reason why so many are so unhappy. But the reason lies within us. As human beings, we undergo the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. We suffer hardships, do not attain what we seek, are parted from our loved ones and find ourselves in the presence of those whom we resent or even hate. The failure of people to understand the real cause of their unhappiness, their suffering is increasing this very suffering.

We all know people who regularly have to take tranquilizers to be able to sleep. Why? They feel their lives are out of control. They wish to control other people and to possess more things. Fifty years ago, people had time to appreciate nature, time to study the works of wise people. Today we have no time for nature, no time for contemplation. Our lives are much more comfortable than were those of our predecessors but we have virtually no spiritual life. So, we search for excitement or take pills to paralyse our feelings, to cover our inability to cope with life.

How can we fix this? Reduce our time at work, at play. With purity of mind, we will need less. Our lives are wasted in our attempts to attain things. We brought nothing into this life. We will take nothing when we leave it. What we need is a simple manner of living. Buddha Shakyamuni lived a simple life with merely the essentials; one meal a day, three clothes, sleeping under a tree at night, yet he lived a happy, content life.

By following his example and living a simple lifestyle we can reduce our attachments and likewise lead contented lives. Work one year, take off one year. A simple manner of living brings us happiness and serenity. If we do not attach to giving or receiving, we will enter the awakened being's state of quiet joy, tranquillity, serenity, gentleness.

How can we change the direction in which we are headed? By learning how to overcome our greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance so that our minds will no longer be deluded by awakened. By understanding the Law of Cause and

Effect. It has been said that Bodhisattvas, who are beings who help others to reach realization after achieving their own, fear causes while sentient beings fear effects. Understanding this as they do, Bodhisattvas fear committing ill effects and therefore, they take steps to avoid creating all negative causes. In so doing, they eradicate the debts; the karmic obstacles generated from their previous wrongdoings as well as accumulate perfect merits and virtues until they reach the state of Buddhahood.

Whether worldly dharma, which includes things, events, phenomena, everything of this world, or Buddha Dharma, which is the teaching of the Buddhas; nothing is beyond the Law of Cause and Effect. It is said that everything is empty and unreal, an eternally impermanent element. But the Law of Cause and Effect is unchangeable and real, an eternally permanent element.

Both cause and effect are closely related as they co-exist mutually. A causal action becomes a consequential effect and this effect in turn gives rise to another causal action. From this endless cycle, we can see that a particular causal action is not fixed. Neither is a single effect the only effect. The combination of cause and effect forms a vicious cycle, the cycle of reincarnation.

A Bodhisattva is an awakened, understanding being and is therefore well aware that every single causal action produces an effect. Because of this, they are very cautious in their every thought, word and action. Fearful that a causal action will become a negative karmic effect in the future. For they will certainly have to personally bear the consequences.

Unlike Bodhisattvas, sentient beings do not understand the principles and the realities of life. The little knowledge we may have is limited and vague, far from complete. Consequently, we carelessly commit causal actions and do not understand, when the effects occur later, why they happened. It is then too

late for us to regret. And for most of us, not only do we not feel remorse, but also we blame others for our misfortune. This in turn creates more bad effects. Cause and effect is constantly being played out all around us. If we are unable to connect the occurrences, it is because we are not mindful, rather we are rash and careless, not yet truly understanding.

Regardless of the method we practice, the method of practicing Buddha name recitation while seeking birth into the Western Pure Land, adheres to the Law of Cause and Effect. For our own sake, we do not want to not create any more bad deeds or causes, to only cultivate kind deeds, which is what ancient masters, sages and the patriarchs tired so hard to encourage us to do.

The Pure Land method allows us to carry our existing karma to the Western Pure Land. However, it is crucial that we understand that existing karma refers to the “old” and not the “new”. This “new” existing karma, which is created in the present, cannot be brought to the Pure Land. Actually, this new karma will be one of the impediments obstructing us from reaching the Pure Land. Carrying over our “old” existing karma means carrying over the negative karma that was created before we began to learn and practice Buddhism.

With this understanding, we must resolve not to create any more negative karma. Only then can we be totally liberated. It would be wrong to think that we can still be born in the Pure Land even if we continue to do bad deeds, that chanting alone will be enough. It has been said that out of ten thousand people, who practice the Buddha Name Recitation Method, only a handful are able to obtain birth into the Pure Land. Why? They did not stop creating negative karma in the present lifetime. In the end, regardless of all their chanting they were unable to obtain birth into the Pure Land. They still bore their consequences in the six realms of reincarnation. It is crucial that we understand this.



To practice Buddhism, we need to bring forth the Bodhi mind. What is the Bodhi mind? The awakened mind. The mind that clearly understands the principles and true reality of life and the universe. The great, compassionate mind, with every thought to attain complete realization for self and to help all others to do so as well. The mind with perfect determination to cease committing all wrongdoings, to cultivate only kind deeds, to practice only virtuous ways.

The great compassionate and sincere Bodhi Mind is to offer without selfishness. It is a mind without self-regard. The mind with no expectation of reward. With this mind, we will be able to care for all beings as we are for ourselves, for our family. Practicing with this Bodhi mind our karmic debts can be eradicated. The Buddha has explained it in this manner so that we are able to understand.

In truth, our karmic debts cannot be eradicated but can only be transformed into good fortune, which is happiness, intelligence, wellbeing, prosperity, etc. It is the great benefit of the human and celestial realms, therefore, it is only temporary and still subject to birth and death. However, transformation is equivalent to elimination to transform our afflictions into the Bodhi mind. It is to transform the cycle of birth and death into the state of Nirvana. In the process of transformation, our merits and virtues become flawless and reach completion as we attain Buddhahood, the ultimate perfection.

In the Flower Adornment Sutra, the Buddha tells us that all sentient beings inherently possess the virtuous abilities and innate wisdom of the Buddhas. In other words, all sentient beings have the same Buddha nature, the same self-nature, our original, true self that we still have, but which is currently obstructed, currently covered by our deluded thoughts, our wandering and discriminatory thoughts and attachments. But this original self-nature is not permanently lost. To uncover this original nature is to attain Buddhahood. To attain the state of perfect and faultless wisdom. Our virtues, talents, abilities

and good fortune are also perfect. Thus, when our every aspect is perfect, we become Buddhas.

Why then are we presently leading such difficult lives? Because of wandering and discriminatory thoughts, attachments: afflictions. Afflictions are all the conditions that cause pain; distress and suffering which disturb the body and mind. Attachments are fixations to certain ideas or objects. They result in our having desires, having strong feelings of selfishness and jealousy, having the longing to control, the longing to possess others. Because of these we dwell on thoughts of what has occurred, what we have remembered, what we have imagined. We are led by these thoughts, unable to stop them.

It is crucial that we cease these attachments, which have made us sad or angry, those that have caused us to have strong emotions for due to these attachments, we cannot stop thinking of ourselves, of what we want. What can we do? As ordinary people, we are still subject to thoughts and feelings of attachment. So, as soon as these thoughts arise, replace them with the “Amitufo”. As the next thought arises, again replace it with the single thought of “Amitufo”. In this way, we can practice anywhere, anytime.

The Buddhas taught us that the universe is generated from our wandering and discriminatory thoughts, is created from our attachments. These obstacles represent false beliefs and wrong viewpoints and have created the forty-one Dharma Body Bodhisattva stages of enlightenment. Why are there different levels? They manifest from our different degrees of ignorance and wandering thoughts.

Where do the Ten Dharma Realms come from? They appear due to the lack of equality, from our discriminatory thoughts. When we harbour one single differentiating thought against other beings, matters or objects, then the Ten Dharma Realms will appear. The highest of these are the Four Sage Realms of Sound-hearer, Pratyekabuddha, Bodhisattva and Buddha.

When we cling to attachments, the Six Realms of Reincarnation of the heavens, asuras, humans and animals, hungry ghosts and hells will appear. And, as our attachments increase, the Three Evil Realms, being the lower of the realms will appear. Finally, when our attachments are the most serious and tenacious, the hell realms will appear. Why are we unable to transcend the cycle of birth and death? Unable to sever our karmic obstacles? Not only do we not yet want to correct our faults; we are constantly increasing them.

How then do we rid ourselves of these deluded and illusory thoughts to uncover the original capabilities and virtues of our self-nature? The only way is by letting go of our wandering and discriminatory thoughts, and attachments. When we have eliminated all of these, we will not only overcome the cycle of birth and death in the Six Realms but will surpass the Ten Dharma Realms as well. And when this happens, we will dwell in the One True Dharma Realm, the state of the Buddhas. And it is within this reality that the Law of Cause and Effect lies.

Wandering and discriminatory thoughts and attachments are causes. Greed and anger and ignorance are causes. The Ten Dharma Realms, comprised of the Four Sage Realms and the Six Realms of Reincarnation, are effects. Since wandering and discriminatory thoughts and attachments generate negative karma, they ought to be eliminated so that our merits and virtues can then be perfect and complete. Cultivating a non-discriminatory mind provides the serenity for practitioners to let go of afflictions. But, it is difficult for most of us to let go due to our sentimental attachments, due to the injustices we feel we have suffered and the grudges we thus hold.

However, feeling this way only puts us at more of a disadvantage because then we suffer the consequences of our grudges. Inequalities exist in this world because of our discriminatory minds. Ordinary people only think in terms of the four forms explained in the Diamond Sutra. “Self, people, other beings and time”. If we do not think in terms of these four forms, then we will break

through our afflictions with the strength from our cultivation. Therefore, when we generate emotions we need to remind ourselves of these four forms and remember that they are only an illusion. When we do this, we will be truly happy, according with conditions and being joyful in the good deeds of others.

The accumulation of merits depends on our cultivation. What is this cultivation? The ability to let go of wandering and discriminatory thoughts, to let go of attachments, to correct our erroneous thoughts and ways. What are virtues? Virtues arise from having accomplished deep concentration, wisdom and the One True Dharma Realm. It is therefore important to understand the meaning of merits and virtues. For the attainment of beneficial merits and virtues is the perfect attainment of Buddhahood.

The merits and virtues bestowed upon the highest levels of Bodhisattvas are not yet perfect. Why? Because they have chosen not to break through the last remaining degree of the illusion of phenomenal existence. They have not relinquished the thinnest shred, the last degree of wandering thoughts and this is why their merits and virtues are not yet perfect. Upon breaking through this last degree of illusion, of ignorance, their merits and virtues will be the perfect completeness, which manifests the attainment of Buddhahood.

Sentient beings commit wrongdoings due to deluded minds and deviated viewpoints. When interacting with people, matters and affairs, we usually act from greed, anger, arrogance, from selfishness, from the wish to be in control of our surroundings. Therefore, to go along with our true nature, we need to give up trying to control and dominate others, to replace thoughts of ourselves with thoughts of all others. Then our purity of mind will increase and our afflictions will decrease. If we achieve this state of mind, we would do well to help others to achieve it as well.

But as long as we still have these thoughts of greed, anger, arrogance, the wish to control others, we still have the causes that will generate our birth into the

Three Bad Realms of animals, hungry ghosts and hells. Why are we born into the animal realms? Ignorance. Greed is the reason we are born into the hungry ghost realms. And anger is the cause of our birth into the hell realms.

There is no way to avoid the effects of negative karma once the wrongdoing has been committed. We ourselves have to bear the consequences, the retribution arising from our misdeeds. No person, god or Buddha can help to reduce our suffering or bear the karmic effects on our behalf. They have neither the authority nor the power to do so. The reality is that we alone must suffer the consequences of our misdeeds. To hope otherwise is like trying to run away from our own shadow. In doing so, we will just perpetrate more wrong conduct.

There are many instances evidencing this phenomenon. Take the example of an ignorant person. Having done a small good deed, he or she hopes to obtain good fortune. This is wishful thinking, wistful dreaming. It is true that we will receive good fortune after doing a virtuous deed. However, such good fortune may not show itself immediately. Why? Because our transgressions are too heavy to be compensated by just one small virtuous deed.

Not understanding this, when things do not go well, we begin to doubt the teachings and question why the Buddha's words are not true? Why do I do good deeds and receive misfortune when others commit wrongdoings and obtain good fortune? We then begin to doubt the Law of Cause and Effect. Consequently, we begin to doubt and inadvertently slander the teachings of the Buddhas. But by so doing, we further increase the severity of our wrongdoings.

There are three aspects of a karmic effect. First, good fortune arising from kind deeds or suffering arising from misdeeds may manifest within the present lifetime. Second, the respective karmic effects may not manifest within the present lifetime but in the next lifetime. Third, such karmic effects

may not manifest until the third lifetime or they may not show up until after innumerable lifetimes. So, causal actions do not give rise to various karmic effects, we just cannot be certain when they will appear.

Under what circumstances would these karmic effects take effect? Good or bad karmic results can only be brought about by the existence of a catalytic condition or circumstance. If the appropriate condition matures in the present lifetime, the respective karmic effect will then manifest itself within the present life time. Hence, the first aspect of a karmic effect.

Similarly, should the catalytic condition mature in the next lifetime, the karmic effect will manifest itself then. Hence, the second aspect of a karmic effect. Finally, should the condition fail to arise after numerous lifetimes, the karmic cause can never be eradicated. Perhaps after the passing of immeasurable eons, the catalytic condition may finally arise and then the karmic effect will manifest itself.

Take for example, a story told by the Buddha in the Lotus Sutra. An old man had requested to become a monk. For this to happen, one needed to have good roots, good fortune, virtues and the right conditions. At that time, all those who became monks under Buddha Shakyamuni's guidance achieved attainment. Buddha Shakyamuni tested his student's ability by asking them to decide whether to accept the old man as a monk. All of the students were Arhats and thus, were capable of knowing a person's past five hundred lifetimes. They doomed the old man as a prospect, because they thought that he had not planted the good roots within those lifetimes.

But, Buddha Shakyamuni told them that infinite eons ago, this old man had been a woodchopper. One day when he ran into a tiger on the mountain, he climbed up a tree to escape, calling out, "Homage to the Buddha", for help. With only those few words, the old man had planted his cause. When he met with Buddha Shakyamuni after innumerable eons, the conditions had matured.

Buddha Shakyamuni therefore accepted the man as a monk who later attained the level of Arhat, a state in which one possesses no erroneous perceptions, views, speech or behaviour. This is an example of a karmic effect, which manifested itself after innumerable lifetimes.

Every thought, word and action arising from our hearts and minds creates a karmic effect. We reap what we sow. By sowing good causes, we reap good consequences: sowing bad causes, we reap bad consequences. Even Buddhas and Bodhisattvas cannot alter this reality. The respective karmic effect will only manifest itself when the relevant condition ripens. If we do not yet see these results, it is only because the appropriate time has not matured.

With thorough understanding of this truth, we will naturally become very watchful of our every thought, word and action. We will also be able to adopt the right attitude when interacting with others, matters and affairs to accumulate more good fortune. When we are yet not able to uncover our virtuous self-nature due to our lack of awakening, we can only receive the benefits through virtuous cultivation.

The guideline for determining good and bad deeds has been clearly defined by the Buddha. When every thought arising from our mind is dedicated to the benefit of all sentient beings, we will create good fortune. But when every thought is solely to benefit ourselves, we will generate negative karma. We need to stop benefiting ourselves at the expense of hurting others for such behaviour only creates negative karma that we will have to repay later. If we do not believe this it will still happen. To correct it, we need to constantly practice great compassion.

Why do we use this guideline of whether we are benefiting ourselves or benefiting others to determine whether we are creating bad or good karma? Remember that the karmic causes of the Ten Dharma Realms are manifested from wandering and discriminatory thoughts and attachments. When every

thought contains the element of “self” , is for “us”, our attachments are very severe. Consequently, we are still lost in the cycle of birth and death. Still mired in the ten realms of existence. Thus, it is negative karma when every rising thought is only of us, our family, our group, our country.

Ordinary people do not understand this, are under the misconception that it is perfectly natural, even correct to think in this way. They do not realize that such views are totally contrary to the wisdom of the Buddha. Unlike the Buddha, we are unable to perceive clearly and thus we have always seen things in a false light. The Buddha, knowing and understanding all, speaks only the truth.

Each and every thought is a karmic act. If a cause arises from wisdom, so then will the effect. If a cause arises from ignorance, so will the effect. Unfortunately, we plant causes mainly due to our ignorance and this is why we have created innumerable transgressions in our past and present lifetimes. Most of the time our bad deeds outweigh our good ones. If our good deeds had exceeded the bad ones, we would have already transcended the cycle of birth and death.

As long as we remain in this cycle, we will undoubtedly commit more bad than good deeds. Thus, we ought to be very cautious and mindful. However, the Buddha tells us that our karma is not fixed and can be transformed. Since everything arises from our minds, karma also arises from our minds. Since our wrongdoings are created by our minds, then they can also be transformed by our minds. Once we have attained purity of mind, our karma will be eradicated.

Often we fail to understand the full impact of the Buddha’s words. This is due to our confused minds and deviated viewpoints. We have read in the sutras that awakened beings, such as Arhats and Bodhisattvas, will be terrified after listening to these words of the Buddha. They tell us that an Arhat will sweat



blood when they remember the unimaginable suffering they underwent in their past lives in the Avici Hell, the lowest of the hell realms. Thus, they are far more vigilant than we are. Since we are not yet capable of knowing our past lives, we do not know, do not remember any of this. We too have all been in the hell realms before. And as long as we are still mired in the cycle of birth and death, we will most certainly go there again and often.

The time spent in the hell realms is comprised of infinite eons while the time spent in the highest level of Heaven is a relatively short eighty thousand great eons. Although we all have committed heavy wrongdoings, we can still be helped before falling into the hell realms. But, once we have descended into them, it is extremely difficult for us to be helped notwithstanding the presence of Earth Treasure Bodhisattva who is there to help all sentient beings. Any Buddha or Bodhisattva, who has an affinity with a sentient being in hell and goes there to teach him or her, is called Earth Treasure Bodhisattva.

We may have an affinity with a sentient being in the hell realms. When we become a Bodhisattva or a Buddha and the catalytic condition has matured, we will be able to go there to help them and then we too will be called Earth Treasure Bodhisattva. Therefore, the name of a Buddha or Bodhisattva is a generic term and does not indicate any one specific individual.

In the Earth Treasure Sutra, we have seen that it is difficult to save sentient beings who have already descended into the hell realms. Earth Treasure Bodhisattva has great wisdom, great supernatural abilities and great transcendent abilities, thus he can help the sentient beings in the hell realms even to reach the Western Pure Land. However, due to our habitual behaviour, when we are able to ascend to the Heaven realms, we continue to commit wrongdoings. And after life in the heaven realms has ended, we will again fall into the hell realms. But to Earth Treasure Bodhisattva it is as if we have returned after only having been gone for a few days. Once in the hell realms, as we experience continuous suffering we will be unable to cultivate. Thus, our

hatred and resultant negative karma will increase and become more binding. The sutras clearly explain this for us. From this, we can begin to understand how difficult it is to help sentient beings who have descended into the hell realms.

At what point in time can we be helped? After we have committed wrongdoings but before we pass on and descend into the hell realms. During this time, we must be awakened so that through feelings of intense remorse and terrifying fear, we will diligently forgo thinking, saying or doing anything that is bad and only do that which is good. In this way, we will maintain purity of mind

And in this way, we can change our present condition and transform a bad situation into a good one. It would be even better if we could bring forth the great Bodhi mind. If at the moment of death, we sincerely regret as we recite “Amitufo” one to ten times and seek birth into the Pure Land, we will accomplish this birth even though we would have gone to the Avici Hell. We will be born there as non-regressive Bodhisattvas. Once there, we will have the opportunity to return to our world to help those whom we have an affinity with to transcend the hell realms.

Often, we may have done various good deeds but continue to be ridiculed and looked down upon by others. Or, we may have suffered serious illness, poverty or misfortune with one life worse than the previous one. Why? Our serious misdeeds have been reduced to a form of light retribution, manifested in the present lifetime. In other words, to be in this situation means that our heavy transgressions have become lighter.

As the Diamond Sutra says, we may be poor, debase or deserve the path of hell due to past transgressions. Because of this, we will suffer poverty and debasement in this lifetime. However, when we accept and practice, we will eradicate our transgressions and eventually obtain the Perfect Complete

Enlightenment. Thus, we are able to transform bad karma with one single thought of enlightenment.

Furthermore, the sutras tell us that when we are performing the deeds of a Bodhisattva, the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and heavenly beings will constantly support and help us. If we encounter obstacles and difficulties when performing these great deeds, it is due to our negative karma being too great. If we can just grit out teeth and diligently perform the deeds to accumulate these merits and virtues, without discriminatory thoughts or attachment, we will overcome the present suffering and bring forth innumerable benefits and good fortune. Act willingly to accord with adversity. To dissolve our debts we need to repay them with calmness, without any trace of hatred or grievance. If we feel hatred, then the debt of the next lifetime will be much greater than it was in this one.

My teacher, Venerable Master Chin Kung is a good example of this. He underwent many years of deprivations but remained diligent and hardworking. Subsequently, he met Ms. Yin-Han and her husband, who provided him with full support. Only then, with a manageable standard of living was he able to continue with his teaching and lecturing. His obstacles and hardships were a result of negative karma created in previous lifetimes. However, in patiently bearing these difficulties, his negative karma was gradually eliminated.

The establishment of the Hwa Dzan Library and the later establishment of the Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation were the turning points. Presently, under his guidance, over fifty Pure Land Learning Centers and Amitabha Buddhist Societies around the world help to propagate Buddhism. This is the manifestation of good fortune, which is in accordance with the teachings in the sutra.

Therefore, we must not be discouraged in the face of adversities. It has been said, that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have arranged everything in our lives. All

hardships and adverse conditions, no matter how severe, have been pre-arranged by them as well. The purpose of these is to gradually eliminate our negative karma until we accumulate merits and virtues. Also, they help cultivators elevate their state of practice and to achieve attainment. Why would the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas wish us ill? True cultivators are very precious to them. Understanding this principle, we will patiently and even gladly endure hardships without feeling discouraged.

Once we have proven the truth of the Buddha's teachings for ourselves, as the Buddha has shown us, we will then be able to understand that any failure, no matter how big or small, is the benevolent arrangement of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. However, those who do not understand this principle will, in the face of adversity, begin to raise doubts in Buddhism. They will then blame the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for not providing them with protection and guidance, further slandering the Triple Jewels. Consequently, they end up committing greater transgressions. How would they not fall back?

The Buddha told us, that we would do well to thoroughly and deeply understand the teachings in the sutras so that we will not feel helpless when crises arise. Regardless of good or bad circumstances, we ought to remain clam and composed. Bad times serve to eradicate our karmic debts. Do good times present any benefit? If we do not possess deep concentration and wisdom during good times, we will regress. Why? Because our minds have given rise to thoughts of greed.

Although we intend to behave properly, for example, not to lose our temper, something happens and we become angry before we can stop ourselves. When we give rise to thoughts of greed and do not get what we want, we give way to resentment. This is because we are controlled by our negative karma. How do we overcome it? By listening more to lectures and putting these teachings into practice. Understanding and practice are equally important as they

complement each other and lead to an even higher state of understanding and practice.

Actually, attaining good fortune may not be good for us. When good fortunes arise and we do not enjoy it but rather we share it with others and thus benefit all sentient beings, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will in turn bring us more good fortune. But, when we do not possess a certain degree of deep concentration and wisdom, they will not immediately bring us good fortune. Why? It would only harm us. They will allow us to suffer a little more because hardship is beneficial to our practice. From this, we realize that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have provided us with unwavering care and guidance for which we need to be grateful. This is something most people are not able to understand.

When most people meet with difficulties, they often blame others, even God. Rarely do they seriously think to reflect on their own faults. When we do not have deep feelings of remorse and regret, it is because of our delusions, our own false views. Today, we often hear of people being cheated. Why do people cheat others? It has unfortunately become an everyday occurrence in our world. But, what is really happening here? If we understand Buddhism and the true reality of life and the universe, we would realize that we are presently being cheated simply because in the past, we cheated others.

Understanding this and despite our having been cheated, we will maintain peace of mind if we look upon the situation as the repayment of a debt. A debt of money must be repaid in cash and a life owed must be repaid in kind. This is principally sound and cannot be avoided.

The Buddha told us that everything is a dream, an illusion, a shadow, a bubble. Nothing is permanent. Nothing can be held on to. Nothing can be gained. This is the true principle. If we remember little else, we would do well to remember this. When we are able to truly understand that nothing can be gained and

thus nothing can be lost, we will finally be free of delusions. Therefore, when we experience hardships, we need to think of them as repayment of a debt. In this way, we will patiently, even gladly give what others want and constantly give rise to thoughts and feelings of remorse and regret.

Today, we see many people with great good fortune, with immense wealth. Where does this wealth come from? It does not happen by mere coincidence or luck. Rather it is accumulated from the cultivation of good deeds in previous lifetimes, from the giving of wealth. The manifestations of misfortune or good fortune do not occur by chance but are due to respective causes created in our innumerable previous lifetimes. When the appropriate condition arises in the present lifetime, it allows the cause to come into effect and therefore produces the result.

We can learn of the life of the Venerable Master Yin-Guang in his journal. Master Yin Guang said that everything is attained through sincerity, which is benefiting oneself; and respect, which is benefiting others. With sincerity and respect, we will be in harmony with others. In order to achieve a peaceful and harmonious society; we need to understand the principles of cause, condition and effect. For others to respect us, we need to respect others first, to change our ways to change the environment for the better. Otherwise, the great disasters in this world, being the shared karma of all sentient beings, cannot be averted.

Thus, throughout his entire life, Master Yin-Guang advocated the teachings of cause, condition and effect with the aid of materials such as the Four Lessons of Liao-Fan, which we now have in English. He tirelessly advocated and wholeheartedly dedicated his life to helping all others. Regretfully, there are many who wish for worldly fortune, but there are few who are truly awakened and who vow to be born into the Western Pure Land.

By his free distribution of books such as Liao Fan's Four Lessons and other books on cause and effect, Master Yin-Guang displayed a great heart of compassion and his devotion to helping humanity. He was indeed a Thus Come Bodhisattva, a manifestation of Great Strength Bodhisattva, who appeared in this world to help sentient beings. Although Master Yin-Guang has passed on, we can follow his example by introducing and extensively propagating the Pure Land method throughout the world with the aid of modern technology. Hopefully, this can help to reduce or even eliminate the disasters in this world that are the results of improper thoughts, words and deeds committed over the past two thousand years. In this way, our merits and virtues will be innumerable and immeasurable.

The Buddha taught us that we should not discriminate between other people and ourselves because we are all one. We need to have compassionate thoughts, do good deeds, say kind words, be a gentle person. To be sincerely concerned for others, to practice loving-kindness.

We all live in the same world, have the same problems. Many of us need help when we have problems. If someone is drowning, and we can swim, we do not ask what religion, what race they are. We do everything we can to help them. If all of us gave help when it was needed, our world would be gentle, peaceful and happy, and we would not have the problems that we do, the hatred, the wars, the disasters.

We can either choose to create problems or to solve them. But if we do not help, we will never solve our problems. We can spend millions of US dollars on a bomb or twenty US dollars to provide for a person in a third world country for a month. We can spend money to kill or to save lives. Which one solves the problem? War will not solve problems, giving unselfishly will. And true giving is totally without expectation of reward. If we expect something then it does not solve the problem. When different cultures and religions respect and help each other, we will finally have a harmonious and prosperous society, a

peaceful and stable world. This is what we hope for. This is our responsibility to create.

When I was in Australia a few months ago with Teacher, we attended the meetings of the Multi-faith Forum, which is sponsored by the government of Australia and the World Conference on Religion and Peace. At these meetings, the leaders of different religious groups share their opinions and ideas on how to resolve the conflicts among different religious and ethnic groups. Their objectives are to establish a harmonious and prosperous multicultural, multi-racial and multi-religious society. To have a stable and prosperous society and country, we first need to have harmonious interaction among cultural, racial and religious groups.

Every culture, religion and ethnic group possesses commendable qualities. And although we come from different backgrounds, we share many similarities. If we use these as a starting point to seek the common ground and lay aside our differences, we will then be able to appreciate each other's good points. In this way, we will sincerely respect each other and no longer wish to interfere with the internal affairs of others or to solve problems by the use of force. In this way, conflicts will naturally dissolve, wars will no longer be fought and our society will be peaceful and prosperous.

Buddha Shakyamuni explained that the universe, everything in it and we, are all one perfect complete entity. If we could all share this understanding, there would be no need to worry about the stability and peace of our society or of our world. For using this as a starting point, we will realize that all others are ourselves.

To harm others is to harm ourselves; to benefit others is to benefit ourselves. When we isolate ourselves from the whole with every rising thought for ourselves, with every ensuing action for our own benefit, then it will be



impossible to avoid confrontations and wars among races, religions and cultures.

From the Buddha's teachings, we learn the importance of practicing and advocating compassion and equality. In our society, everybody plays a different role, but everybody's role is equally important and necessary. There is no good or bad, high or low, just the difference between the assignment of tasks.

At the beginning of the Flower Adornment Sutra, there are one hundred seventy-five groups attending the assembly who are of different species from different worlds throughout the universe. It is the quintessential multicultural, the gathering together of beings from different worlds with different beliefs. In order to help us to achieve this same harmony, all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas first explain that the universe is perfect, is one entity.

The Chinese classic from three thousand years ago, I Ching, the Book of Changes explains how Heaven and Earth, the four seasons and all phenomena were originally formed from infinite particles. Lao Zi clarified further that the universe and we share the same root and that all creations and we are one entity. As Buddha Shakyamuni said, we all arose from this same essence.

Let me tell you a story that someone reminded me of recently. We both heard it from the Zen Buddhist Master Thich Nhat Hanh. It is about the Buddha and Mara, who is the embodiment of all that is bad, all that is evil. It was Mara that the Buddha defeated the night he sat down under the Bodhi tree vowing not to rise until he attained enlightenment.

One day the Buddha was in his cave and Ananda, who was his attendant, was standing outside, near the door. Suddenly Ananda saw Mara approaching. He was very surprised. He did not want that to happen and frankly, he wished

Mara would get lost. But, Mara walked right up to Ananda and asked him to announce his visit to the Buddha.

Ananda immediately questioned him. “Why are you here. Don’t you remember that a long time ago the Buddha defeated you under the Bodhi tree? Aren’t you ashamed to be here? Go away! The Buddha will not see you. You are evil. You are his enemy”. When Mara heard Ananda say this, he began to laugh. “Did you say that your teacher told you that he has enemies?” Ananda could not say anything else and had to go to tell the Buddha of Mara’s visit, hoping that the Buddha would say, “Go tell him that I’m not here. Tell him that I’m in a meeting.”

But instead, the Buddha was very excited to hear that Mara, an old friend, had come to visit. “Is it true? Is he really here?” the Buddha said and he went right up to Mara, bowed to him and took his hands in his in the warmest possible manner. The Buddha said, “Hello! How have you been? Is everything all right”? But Mara did not say anything. So the Buddha brought him into the cave, prepared a seat for him and told Ananda to go and fix some tea, Ananda went to do so but kept listening to the conversation.

The Buddha warmly repeated, “How have you been? How are things going with you?” Mara replied, “Things are not going at all well. I am tired of being a Mara. I want to be something else. You know being a Mara isn’t easy. When you talk, you have to talk in riddles. If you do anything, you have to be tricky and look very evil. Frankly, I’m really tired of it all. But, what I especially can’t bear is my followers. These days, all they talk about is injustice, peace, equality, liberation and non-violence. I’ve had enough of it. I think it would be better if I turned them all over to you. I want to be something else.”

The Buddha listened carefully and was filled with compassion. Finally, he said in a quiet voice, “Do you think its fun being a Buddha. You don’t know what my followers have done to me. They put words into my mouth that I never said.

They build garish temples and put statues of me on the altars to attract bananas and oranges and rice and then they eat them themselves. And they package me and turn my teachings into a commercial endeavour. Mara, if you really knew what it was like to be a Buddha, I'm sure you would not want to be one."

One of the things the Buddha and Mara were talking about was selfishness. Our selfishness has resulted in our harming others to benefit ourselves. This way of thinking has led to quarrels among people, feuds among families, wars among countries. It is the basic cause of natural and human-made disasters. If we observe this world calmly, we might well wonder what is the cause of these increasing disasters. Our increasing selfishness. As the Buddha told us, all consequences come from our ignorance, our false beliefs and wrong viewpoints.

If we think of a tree as representing the universe and look at its leaves individually, as ourselves, they appear to be separate but in reality they are part of the whole. Our thinking of ourselves as being separate creates barriers and confrontations. If we were to look more carefully, we would see that the leaves originate from the same branch and that all branches grow from the same trunk. Looking deeply into the tree, to its root, we realize that the leaves, branches, trunk, roots are all one entity.

Once we truly understand this, all confrontations will vanish, as our loving-kindness and compassion naturally arise, as we care for others as we care for ourselves. We can help to teach others to have no attachments, to be happy and at ease. Who can we help? Sentient beings in the whole universe. Too many? Then just teach the whole world.

How? As students of the Buddha, we have the duty to propagate Buddhism properly, to guide all sentient beings. There are people with good roots who can easily accept the teachings and there are others who lack good roots and

thus are unable to accept the teachings no matter how hard we try to explain them.

However, we need to give up judging others and to reflect upon ourselves and see whether our way of introducing the Dharma is correct, whether we have used convenient and skilful methods of propagation. Whether we are really employing our wisdom in helping these beings by using ways, that suit their manner of living and level of understanding.

The most significant problem is that we do not have true sincerity. Our mind, our heart is not sincere enough. If we have true sincerity, we can penetrate solid rock. If we have true sincerity we will be able to touch people and then we can help them to learn the Buddha's teachings. But, we cannot, must not try to change a person's religious belief. When I was in Australia, I met a fellow practitioner, who recently visited Singapore. He told teacher about being questioned s to how to convert Christians to Buddhists. Teacher and he agreed that this was wrong.

Instead, we need to help Christians to be good Christians, Muslims to be good Muslims, Hindus to be good Hindus. How can we convert a Christian to a Buddhist? How can we destroy a person's religious beliefs? How can we negate what their parents taught them? To do so is wrong. However, if we encourage these Christians, these Muslims, these Hindus to be Bodhisattvas, beings who try to help all other beings, then we will be doing good. We do not help others by making them change their beliefs. Buddhism is a teaching of the wisdom that will help others to understand the true reality of life and the universe. While people do need to understand the truth, they do not need to change their religious beliefs to do so.

We cannot ask them to give up their beliefs, to betray their parents, their god. Buddhism cannot break the customs, the laws of this world. If we convert people to Buddhism, we are destroying the law. Please understand that

Buddhism is not a religion. It is an education and we are students of the Buddha. We are not religious followers.

In the Flower Adornment Sutra, we learn of a Brahmin who was a religious leader. In actuality, he was a Bodhisattva who manifested as a religious leader. In so doing, he helped many sentient beings. If a Bodhisattva wants to help Christians, he can appear as a Christian religious teacher. If a Bodhisattva wants to help Muslims, he can appear as a Muslim religious leader. In this way, Bodhisattvas can help all beings to be good citizens.

But, if we are narrow minded and we stubbornly say that your religion is not as good as mine, that mine is better, then we are totally wrong. For, with this thinking, we will be unable to solve our problems. We will only create disharmony and conflicts. The Buddha taught four basic principles to use in helping others. The first is to make others happy. Because if others are not happy with us, then we have no good affinities with them and if we wish to help others, we need to have good affinities for them to accept what we say.

At the New Year's Eve Charity Dinner, we had well over three thousand guests from different religions and different cultures. We were all together in one place for dinner and yet the dishes that were served were different. While we had vegetarian meals, the Malays had meals that were tailored to their tastes. We provided them with what they wanted and were used to. We did not expect them to eat like we do.

To help others, to bring gentleness and peace to our world, we need to understand who they are and what their likes and dislikes are. Then we will know how to respect their customs and wishes. We must show care and compassion towards all. We should learn of the teachings of other religions. Then we can explain Buddhism to them if and when they wish to learn. It is wrong for us to want them to give up their beliefs. We should care for others. Find out how to help them to attain their goals, to meet their needs, to help

them to propagate their religions. Then they will be happy. Then they will be contented.

Recently, when we visited the aged and children's homes of the Muslims and the Hindus, we gave them gifts of food and financial support. We did so because we were able to and because we are all on entity. We must be able to cooperate with each other because with good interaction we will be able to establish and develop lasting relationships.

To do this, we practice giving; one of the Six Paramitas practiced by Bodhisattvas. Giving includes the giving of wealth, the giving of Dharma and the giving of fearlessness. The highest form of giving is that of Dharma. One way to do this is to use kind speech. When we converse with others, we use words of loving-kindness and compassion for we truly care for them. We do not use empty sweet words that just sound good. We use speech that shows we sincerely care for them.

The next is to work together with them. For example, our next planned event is a multi-cultural, multi-faith festival. It is a celebration of all cultures, all religions. It is a celebration of the Flower Adornment as seen in the Flower Adornment Sutra. The Flower Adornment is a true practice of multi-culture. It is the true world of truth, goodness, virtue and beauty. The Western Pure Land and the Flower Store World live a multi-cultural festival every day.

In Buddhism, when we learn something worthwhile, we must put it into practice. Thus, we must put the Dharma into practice. We must truly help sentient beings to become Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. There is unity in diversity and diversity in unity. Thus in unity we all share the common wisdom, common teachings. Unity does not adversely effect diversity and diversity does not adversely effect unity. Rather, they are true beauty, happiness and harmony.

As ordinary people, we so often make the mistake of trying to force others to be the same as us. But, we must give up the thought to control others, give up the thinking to possess others. Only in this way, we will be able to enter the great festival of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. If we still have the thought to control others, we will always remain mired in the six realms of reincarnation, unable to enter the state of the Buddhas. Once, we live among the Buddhas we will be able to live harmoniously with all other groups. We now see many conflicts, many wars around the world. Why do we hate? Why do we fight? Why do we kill? Different cultures, different religious beliefs. But, how can we even begin to think that war can solve our problems?

Buddha Shakyamuni renounced his life as a prince in a wealthy country and left home to become a monk. Why? He was heir to the kingship but he knew that he could not attain peace through politics. He was a great warrior, but he knew that he could not attain peace through warfare. He was a great leader but he knew that he could not attain peace through economics. He was a brilliant student, but he knew that he could not attain peace through science. He knew that only through education and understanding, could he attain peace and thus became a teacher.

Only through education will we be able to truly solve our problems. Only by working together towards the same goals will we be able to attain peace and harmony. Only by helping each other will we be able to live and prosper together. And only if we are able to establish common thinking will we be able to eliminate the approaching disasters.

If we can accomplish this, we will truly reach the non-duality between others and us. Then we will understand that we are one being, are all interrelated with one another. This is truly realizing that the universe is one ideal family, that all groups are one perfect complete multiculture. Thus all disputes between others and we will naturally dissolve as we experience great broad

mindedness. Those who have this great broad mindedness and understanding are awakened beings like Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

They have learned to give up trying to control others. Have learned to give up selfishness and jealousy. To give up sentimental attachments. To give up blaming others for their problems. To give up expectations of reward and thoughts of self, people, other beings and time.

They understand that everything, every being, in the universe is subject to the Law of Cause and Effect. They understand that every causal action produces an effect. Understand that we alone are responsible for everything that happens to us. Understand that everything is an illusion, that nothing can be attained, that there is no real gain, there is no real loss.

The principles and methods of the Buddha's teachings are both logical and practical. These teachings are a treasure of humanity. The wisdom, the common thread that is the very essence, the very heart, the very root of our religious and secular cultures. This wisdom is the perfection of the universe, which can perfectly solve all of our problems.

We need to practice great goodness, great gentleness. To care for others not for ourselves. To enter the awakened beings state of quiet joy, tranquillity, serenity. By doing so, we will bring understanding, awakening and true peace to our world, to all the worlds throughout the universe.



## Volume VI

### “THE SOLUTION: GENTLE HEARTS AND SERENE MINDS”

By Venerable Wu Lin

Respected Dharma Masters, respected practitioners and guests. I would like to again welcome you to the Singapore Buddhist Lodge and to express my continued gratitude at my great fortune, our great fortune, to all be here in this rarest of way places. One floor below us is a wondrous cultivation hall where chanting has continued daily for at least twelve hours a day. After its opening several months ago, we have spent a good part of our weekends Buddha Name Chanting. This cultivation hall is very special. The air feels different, the chanting sounds clearer, the cultivation is stronger.

This lecture hall is also very special for talks have been given here every day since May 18<sup>th</sup> when Master Chin Kung began his talks on the Flower Adornment Sutra. We come to the lecture hall to listen to the teachings. We come to the cultivation hall to practice those teachings. We need both.

In recent years, our world has become beset with adversities and our lives filled with increasing suffering and unhappiness. As time goes on, these adversities will become more and more severe, more and more frequent. Someone asked how the Great Compassionate Buddhas and Bodhisattvas help all sentient beings to be liberated from pain. They do this by teaching us to overcome greed, anger and ignorance so that our minds will no longer be deluded, but awakened. By teaching us the Law of Cause and Effect.

To end our suffering, we first have to know what causes it. As human beings, we undergo the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. We suffer

hardships, do not attain what we seek, are parted from our loved ones and find ourselves in the presence of those whom we resent or even hate. We are surrounded by all these with no apparent way of being truly free.

We need to understand that catalytic conditions or circumstances have to exist for a cause to generate an effect. By controlling these catalytic conditions, we can have some influence on our consequences. We need to practice good deeds during our lifetime to generate good karma. Then we will truly appreciate that living a happy and fulfilling life is the karmic result generated from a good cause and a good condition. And this is the way to attain liberation from suffering and to attain happiness.

Today, many of us feel the weight of our negative karma and we witness the unhappiness and suffering around us. They are caused by our selfish and erroneous behaviour. By our choosing to benefit ourselves at the expense of others. How do we remove this negative karma? How do we prevent further occurrences? By practicing what the Buddha taught. By dedicating ourselves to helping and benefiting society, by not protecting ourselves while harming others.

Most of us have the sub-conscious desire to control other people, animals, even inanimate objects. But by letting go of this attachment, we can be liberated. Awakened beings live their lives with great ease. They fulfil their responsibility of advising and educating sentient beings by explaining to them the true reality of life and the universe, the Law of Cause and Effect. By explaining that every cause, every thought, word and action has a result.

Whatever people decide to do, it is their choice, their consequence. We simply accord with the condition as we educate them and then leave the rest up to them. By doing this, our mind will remain serene, as it generates the concentration and thus the wisdom to effectively interact with people, matters and objects. The benefits that can be derived from such practice are infinite

and boundless. Not only can our present suffering be resolved, but our negative karma accumulated over infinite life times can be eliminated as well.

Why then are we unable to realize the true benefit? Because we are obstructed by our own negative karma, unable to see what is right before our very eyes? We are constantly reminded by the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Constantly prompted by our reciting the sutra. Impelled by our daily chanting of the Buddha's name and listening to dharma talks. Yet, we still are unable to truly comprehend the teachings, still unable to apply the principles in our daily living.

We cannot blame the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for not helping. The fact is they are trying to. We are not paying attention. We have a wondrous and rare chance to encounter Buddhism, which is about to slip by us. To be born as human beings who are able to hear the teachings is an unbelievably rare opportunity, not encountered for millions of years. To encounter the teachings is as rare as a bubble rising to the surface of a vast sea and breaking the surface of that sea within the one wreath of flowers that is floating upon it.

Allowing this to happen will be a tragic mistake that is entirely of our own making. To prevent this from happening, we need to reflect and feel remorse for our mistakes. This is a learning process that will enable us to overcome our afflictions and worldly habits and thus to remove our negative karma.

What is this negative karma? A part of it is these afflictions and worldly habits. How do we overcome these? By feeling deep regret for our mistakes and vowing to not commit them again. Daily practice will help to decrease our negative karma. It is to practice in the midst of society, not to be separated from it. We can choose any one of the eighty-four thousand methods that the Buddha taught. From all these infinite ways, he tells us that in this Dharma Ending Age, the Buddha Name Chanting Method is the most convenient,

simple and effective. It can generate the positive effect and thus the strength needed to eradicate our afflictions and negative karma.

Some people have questioned why they do not yet feel the results of their daily chanting. It is not because the chanting method is ineffective. Some practitioners have achieved remarkable results and successfully eliminated their negative karma. If we are not feeling the results it is because our daily practice does not accord with the Buddha's guidance, in other words, we are not doing what we are advised to do. Instead we are doing what we are advised not to do. For example, are we refraining from killing any living creature, refraining from stealing? Are we refraining from committing the misdeeds of stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, abusive language, bearing tales, seductive words, greed, anger and ignorance?

We would do well to follow the Buddha's guidance. This will help to decrease our negative karma. Our chanting, our daily practice and our goals need to accord with the principles in the teachings. Our recitation of the sutra reminds us of the teachings and of our need to accord with them to correct our erroneous ways. Failure to do so will increase our negative karma.

Our goal is the mind of sincerity, purity, equality, compassion and awakening. Only with this mind will we be able to solve all problems. They cannot be solved by physical force, by war. They are solved with gentleness and loving-kindness toward all other beings, animate and inanimate. It is in our best interest to be rid of the desire to control, for it will only result in our committing further transgressions, thus increasing our negative karma. No one can truly control another. History provides us with many examples of countries that tried to use force to control another country; Hitler's invasion of Europe, the Japanese invasion of China, the Russians in Afghanistan and the United States in Vietnam. All failed.

On the other hand, the work of Master Chin Kung in propagating Buddhism throughout the world, especially in China where he freely distributes tapes and books to teach people to practice good deeds has resulted in over twenty million people listening to the Buddha's teachings. He did not have to spend much to gain this kind of result. Instead of those countries spending huge sums of money on warfare, they could have spent the money on caring for and supporting people who are suffering hardships. In this way, they would have peacefully and easily won them over. Or they could have used the money to educate their own citizens, to help them become self-sufficient; to pay more attention to internal needs instead of constantly interfering with external affairs.

Our every thought needs to be of benefiting all sentient beings. Not only in our behaviour should we never hurt any sentient beings, but also we should never give rise to a single hostile thought or say anything that can cause distress to others. If we can truly follow this teaching then in our daily lives no matter what we do, there will be great goodness, great gentleness. This is the way to truly influence people, with loving-kindness and compassion. Using physical force to try to solve problems will not only create enemies but will also generate the cause to be born into the hell realms. By practicing in accordance with the teachings, we will achieve results for in this way we will transform our minds, everything can be transformed by our minds. When we accord with the teachings, our thoughts will change; our actions will be proper and correct.

We would do well to let go of selfishness, to only have thoughts that benefit others. Instead, we are wrapped up in our own concerns, thinking only of protecting the interests of ourselves, our group or our country. This way of thinking has led to quarrels between people, feuds between families, wars between countries. It has led to massive damage on both sides; the tragic loss of lives, the excessive monetary cost, the disastrous destruction of land, the

final destruction of friendships and peace and the grave consequences incurred due to the Law of Cause and Effect.

Our complete lack of concern for the plants, living and non-living creatures of our natural environment has resulted in the destruction of our environment. Ultimately, it is we ourselves who suffer from this negligence and lack of compassion. We are all one entity, one being, all interrelated closely with one another. Everything, including us arises from the coming together of causes, so to harm others is to harm ourselves.

Once we thoroughly comprehend this, we will have no more problems. Being overly concerned with our own interest and those of our group and country, is the root cause of all misfortunes and adversities. Taking care of this problem solves everything else. When we practice accordingly, with proper and caring behaviour, we will see an increase in our good karma and a decrease in our bad. In turn, our suffering will be reduced or eliminated. In other words, we will experience a favourable change in our circumstances.

When we give rise to one single bad thought of inequality, we turn a favourable situation into an unfavourable one. However, with one single good thought of equality, the Buddha realm will appear in that moment. When we give rise to one single thought of the Bodhisattva way, the Bodhisattvas realm will appear in that moment. Likewise, with one thought of greed, anger or ignorance, our daily lives will become unsettled and unmanageable. However, with one thought of purity, our lives will become harmonious and peaceful. Thus, the world in which we live will become the Western Pure Land.

Our life is short. However, we are unbelievably fortunate to have been born as humans, able to listen to the Buddha's teaching, able to understand a little of its profound and incomparable truth. The Law of Cause and Effect is unchangeable, is permanent. We reap what we sow. By sowing good causes,

we reap good consequences; sowing bad causes, we reap bad consequences. Even Buddhas and Bodhisattvas cannot alter this reality.

However, with the causes that we have already planted, we can learn how to alter our catalyst condition before it comes into effect. Furthermore we need to refrain from committing any more bad deeds and to commit more good deeds, to distance ourselves from adverse conditions. In some cases this can reduce or eliminate the bad effect. In this way we can control our own consequences, transform our environment and change the direction in which we are currently headed.

We are learning of more and more prophecies that speak of upcoming disasters, even of the end of the world. These prophecies also tell us that these could neither be reduced or delayed or even prevented if we replaced our incorrect ways with those that are good, with those that benefit others and not ourselves. But if we do not turn back now, then it will be very hard to avoid them.

It is crucial that people understand that using physical force cannot solve problems, for even if we totally destroy a country, even if we detonate enough bombs to wipe out the face of the earth, it still will not solve our problems. We cannot waste this opportunity but need to cultivate in a sincere and diligent manner, to apply the principles with unselfish thought and behaviour. To be good, to be warm, to be sincere, to put all our efforts into helping others. In this way, all that is good will come our way.

Buddha Shakyamuni told us that there are three cataclysmic disasters and three lesser disasters in this world. The cataclysmic ones are comprised of fire, water and wind. The Flower Adornment Sutra tells us that disasters of fire can burn up to the First Meditation Heaven Realm, one of the twenty-eight levels of the heavens. This is the highest realm that a fire can reach. Fire is caused when ordinary people feel jealousy, feel hatred.

Since this First Meditation Heaven is still subject to fire disasters, we know that even these heavenly beings have not yet completely suppressed their anger. They have cultivated the Four Immeasurable Hearts of loving kindness, compassion, joy and letting go, but the cultivation of these four hearts still cannot effectively suppress their angers. Thus, they are still subject to fire disasters.

Beings in the Second Meditation Heaven Realm have thoroughly conquered their anger since they do not give rise to any thought of hatred. So, this heaven realm will not suffer from fire. However, it is still subject to flood disasters, which can submerge this heaven realm. Where does the flood come from? From our greed.

Having attained deeper concentration than those in the First and Second Heavens, the beings in the Third Meditation Heaven, will not suffer fires or floods. But they are still subject to wind disasters, which are caused by ignorance.

The Fourth Meditation Heaven Realm has no fire, flood or wind. Therefore, we call this heaven realm the good fortune heaven. The beings here possess the foremost fortune among the six realms.

If we want to avoid or to be rid of all disasters, we must sever our greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance. We should neither feel greed for worldly teaching nor for the Buddha's teachings. For to feel the slightest trace will block us from severing the mind of greed. Will block us from eradicating the disasters, which are increasing in both frequency and severity. This is very important. These have been predicted by many ancient prophecies from respected religious leaders in many different countries.

Three thousand years ago Buddha Shakyamuni told us of the partial destruction of the world, which would be from war, epidemic and famine. He



told of a war that would last for seven days and seven nights. Then there would be an epidemic that would last for seven months and seven days. Finally, a famine that would last for seven years, seven months and seven days. In the past, it was difficult to imagine how a war could last just seven days but have such devastating results. It was beyond imagination.

But when Master Chin Kung was in Hiroshima and Nagasaki on a trip to Japan, he realized that what the Buddha was describing was nuclear warfare. In Nagasaki, after the atomic explosion, many

People survived the explosion itself, but were infected with atomic fallout and consequently many of them died during the first six months. This can be described as an epidemic.

The radiation sickness that results from atomic fallout is insidious. It starts by destroying one white cell and gradually progresses until there is massive cell destruction then uncontrolled bleeding and finally, death. Anyone, who was still alive at least seven months after the detonation would be considered as having survived the immediate effects of the bomb.

For years after the explosion, there were no trees, no plants, no grass. All was barren. The trees and grass started to grow approximately eight years after the detonation of the bombs. It was as the Buddha had told us; the ground would grow nothing for seven years, seven months, seven days. In this period, all will suffer from famine.

From this, we realize that the partial destruction of the world that was told to us by the Buddha is indeed that of nuclear warfare. Could it really happen? Many believe it is very likely. Access to nuclear weapons is becoming more widespread, more difficult to control. No one knows how long this tentative control can be maintained. Very honestly, the only way to attain real control is to encourage and help all to understand the need to prevent human made

tragedies. If we observe the world situation objectively, then we will see that it is very difficult to avoid this probably disaster.

If the war were to happen now, half of the world's population could be killed. How can we escape such a war? The day before he passed on to the Western Pure Land, Master Chin Kung's teacher, Mr Bing-Nan Lee told his students, that this world was going to experience a significant disaster. Even Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and Heavenly beings would not be able to help. He urged his students that the only way to free themselves would be to seek birth into the Pure Land. To assure this, we need to stop all bad thoughts, speech and behaviour.

We need to accumulate only good deeds. How? By ceasing all selfish ideas, by constantly thinking of how to benefit all others, by letting go of our own interest for the sake of others. This will stop our bad deeds and help us to accumulate only good ones. But, if our every thought is only of ourselves, it will be very difficult for us to avoid this approaching disaster.

Why do we persist in our anger, our hatred, our fighting? Why do we have conflicts, the inability to tolerate others? Why do we seem so determined to keep heading towards the brink? Selfishness. Wrong viewpoints. The inability to truly care for others. The inability to truly understand that everything arises from our minds. The inability to understand that every thought we have is instantly felt throughout the entire universe.

We need to let go of our selfishness and comprehend that the whole universe is our home and that we are one with the universe. We have the same self-nature as Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The difference between them and we is that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas comprehend this. All sentient beings have been our past parents. All sentient beings will be future Buddhas. Understanding this, how can we not be respectful to all beings? How can we possibly harm them?

We originally had this comprehension, this great broad mindedness. Then why are we so narrow minded now? We are deluded, unable to see through our false beliefs and wrong viewpoints. Our innate wisdom and abilities are thus temporarily lost to us. However, if we can break through this delusion, then we will be able to uncover this wisdom for it is not permanently lost. In the Flower Adornment Sutra, we can see the broad-mindedness of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. All of the infinite and countless numbers of beings at the assembly who gathered to hear this unsurpassed teaching are one.

If we could just understand this true reality and expand our mind, then we too would recognize that no matter what race, what religion, what culture, we are all one. With this wisdom; discrimination, misunderstanding and conflict among beings would naturally diminish. First, man made tragedies would be avoided. Then what we think of as natural tragedies would likewise dissolve.

The environment changes with our minds. When our minds are serene and compassionate, our living environment will become tranquil and peaceful. As we learn of the magnificence of the Western Pure Land from the Infinite Life Sutra, we might ask where this magnificence and adornment come from? The sutras tell us that only the most virtuous people dwell there. Thus, the wonderful environment is a reflection of their virtues, their minds.

Today our living environment is being polluted and destroyed. Some say that the earth is rapidly becoming unsuitable for living. How did this happen? It is the result of the bad intentions and deeds of we human beings. And this is the real reason for what is happening today. To save our world, we need to use great wisdom to help those who are deluded to become awakened. How? Through education. All the great sages have used education to overcome ignorance. For example, Buddha Shakyamuni taught for forty-nine years and Confucius taught for his entire lifetime.

But how can we reach enough people to change what is about to happen? High technology. Once we begin to understand and awaken, we can use high technology to bring our message to everyone. It is not too late to save our world. If all the worldwide television companies would broadcast two hours of the teaching everyday, in one year the earth could return to normal. The disasters would naturally cease. The environment is a reflection of our mind, so if there are more people who are thinking of others of saving our world, of peace, then it will happen.

There are areas around the world where broadcasting has already begun. In Taiwan, there are three to four hours of lectures broadcast daily. In large areas of North and Central America including Canada, the US, Mexico and Panama, there is at least one hour of lectures broadcast daily. In Macao and Hawaii, there are two lectures weekly. If more people watch, the stations will increase the broadcasting time and hopefully the languages of the lectures as well. This needs to be done quickly to urge people to change for the better. In this way, we can help to save our world.

The most pressing need is to set up Internet locations. From our Singapore Way Place there are at least two hours of lectures broadcast daily, both in Chinese and in English. People around the world, who have access to a computer, are able to receive a live transmission. We use the internet to communicate with each other and can answer questions during the Morning Talks that are broadcast five days a week. Since we use high technology do we really need to build any way places? Yes, for two reasons. One is to train new lecturers; the other is to provide a place for people to practice together.

In this way, people around the world can listen to the lectures. But we also need to practice, to use the Buddha Name Chanting Method. The Buddha tells us that for our times, the primary way to be assured of success in cultivation is to rely on this method. What do we chant? "Namo Amitufo". "Namo" means to turn back, to take refuge. This does not mean that we take refuge with the

Dharma Master but rather that we return and rely. “Amitufo”, means infinite and awakening. Thus, “Namo Amitufo” means to turn back and rely upon the infinite awakening.

What are the benefits of Buddha name chanting? Upon what principles is it based? The Buddha tells us that “everything arises from our minds”. In other words, the environment is a reflection of our thoughts. Not yet having become Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, we still have discriminating thoughts, wandering thoughts, afflictions, attachments. Still have greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance. The increase of these thoughts is what has caused the increase in the frequency and severity of today’s problems. From disagreements in our family to discord in our country to chaos unimaginable chaos in our world if nothing is done to neutralize them.

How? Chanting “Amitufo” enables us to restore our minds to purity, equality, awakening and peace. When our minds are at peace, the environment will in turn reflect serenity and tranquillity. Our thoughts create waves. In the sixties, westerners referred to these as “Vibrations”. What we did not understand was the breadth that these “Vibes” had. We thought of them simply on an interpersonal level. But the strength from this kind of thought wave is amazing, able to neutralize the turbulent thought waves even from other’s greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance.

The principle and basis of Buddha name chanting are these thought waves. The Buddha understood this and told of them three thousand years ago. The purpose is to achieve so much more than our individual birth into the Western Pure Land. Buddha Shakyamuni knew and understood how great our present need would be. And he taught how to change the fate of the world. Not for himself, but for us.

Understanding the need for Buddha name chanting, how do we proceed? We can gather in a Chanting Hall where dharma masters using musical

instruments lead the group. As we would imagine, the effect from everyone chanting together harmoniously is the most productive. But if time or the lack of a good chanting hall make this difficult, then we can simply turn on the chanting machine in our own home and chant along with it.

When working, concentrate on working. When finished, immediately start chanting. As wandering thoughts arise; pay no attention to them. Upon giving rise to the first wandering thought, immediately replace the second thought with “Amitufo”. If wandering thoughts again rise, then again replace the thought with “Amitufo”. Do this continuously until every thought is of mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha.

One does not have to be a Buddhist to receive the benefits from chanting. At the Dallas Buddhist Association in the US, several neighbourhood children have come and asked for chanting machines. A psychologist who came to a seven-day retreat said that he played the chanting machine all day in his office because his clients said they felt calmer while listening to it.

When my mother was in the hospital for an operation for cancer we gave a chanting machine and beads to one of the nurses, a devout Christian, who had told us that she liked to hear the chanting when she came into the room. When my mother went back three months later for a follow up visit, the nurse who heard we were back, found me and said that she and her husband listened to the chanting every night because it was so calming.

We never know when someone will benefit from chanting. My sister who does not listen to it told me of an airplane trip she had recently taken. They had entered an area of strong turbulence and the plane was experiencing unusually violent movements. My sister, who has travelled a great deal, was being buffeted like everyone else. Suddenly she remembered “Amitufo, Amitufo, Amitufo”.

In addition to chanting, there are other teaching aids to help us in our mindfulness. When we first enter the Cultivation Hall to join in the group chanting, we will see images of one Buddha and two Bodhisattvas. In a Pure Land way place, they will be Buddha Amitabha, Great Compassion Bodhisattva and Great Strength Bodhisattva. Buddha Amitabha symbolizes our original self-nature. Great Compassion Bodhisattva symbolizes compassion. Great Strength Bodhisattva symbolizes wisdom. Compassion and wisdom are the two virtues for us to cultivate to uncover our original self-nature, reminding us to be compassionate towards others, to be rational and not emotional, to be awakened.

On the Buddha table, we will see several objects. Again, they are teaching aids not objects of worship. For Buddhism is not a religion but an education. A cup of water symbolizes the teachings. The clear water symbolizes the principle that our mind needs to be as pure as the water, to be void of greed, anger and ignorance. It is calm without a single ripple indicating that we interact with people and matters with the serene and non-discriminating mind of equality. Furthermore, it is pure and calm, reflecting clearly and thoroughly just as we would see everything around us in a mirror.

Flowers symbolize the cause as the blossom result in the bearing of fruit, which is also seen frequently on the Buddha Table. The fruit serves to remind us that there are consequences from our every thought, word and action.

Lamps, which have replaced candles symbolize wisdom and brightness illuminating the darkness of our ignorance. Incense symbolizes self-discipline and deep concentration as well as the giving of ourselves to benefit others. Chanting enables us to suppress our afflictions and to neutralize the negative vibrations from our thoughts.

Generally early in our practice, we begin to generate the vows to accomplish our goals. Every Buddha, every Bodhisattva when they start to cultivate,

generates great vows. No matter what vows they make, they cannot surpass the Four Great Vows of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

1. Sentient beings are innumerable, I vow to help them all,
2. Afflictions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them all,
3. Ways to practice are boundless, I vow to master them all and
4. Enlightenment is unsurpassable, I vow to attain it.

We start with the first vow, then proceed to the second, etc. In other words, before attaining unsurpassable Enlightenment, we need to master the ways of practice. Before we master the ways of practice, we need to end afflictions. And before beginning to end afflictions, we need to vow to help all sentient beings. These vows are profound and vast. Bodhisattvas have already fulfilled these Four Vows. While, we may have generated the four great vows but we probably have not yet fulfilled any of them.

Our viewpoints, our thoughts have to accord with the great vows. The second way to end all afflictions accords with the original vow of all Buddhas. If we have not cut off our afflictions then how can we help all sentient beings? Only when we succeed in cutting off our afflictions, can we transcend the ten realms.

Only after we have cut off our afflictions, can we learn different methods. To be virtuous is not enough; we also need to have knowledge, intelligence and wisdom because we will have to help all kinds of different species, different sentient beings. If we want to gain perfect wisdom and undefeated eloquence, we will need to be well versed in countless methods.



If we cannot reach the highest level to become a Buddha, we cannot help all sentient beings. We can only help those, whose level is lower than ours. Only when we reach the state of the Buddha, the state of perfect complete enlightenment, will we possess the ability to help all sentient beings.

So, the first vow is our original vow while the following three help us achieve the first. To generate the vows but not cultivate to meet them will be futile. Cultivation and vows compliment each other. As long as we work diligently, never regress and generate the vow to reach the state of the Buddha, we will attain the dharma joy.

In our past lives, too innumerable to count, we have indulged our bad habits. Today Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have taught us how to cut off these bad habits. But this is so difficult for us to do. Most of us think it is difficult to break the habits of a lifetime. But, actually we need to break the habits of infinite lifetimes. Remember that this is a process. Once we break through our bad habits, our cultivation will become easier and smoother; then we can fulfil our vows. Then we can go to the Western Pure Land and from there, we can help all sentient beings.

Recently some people came to Master Chin King and questioned how they could be confident that they would go to the Pure Land. He asked them if they were sure they could go in this lifetime. They honestly shook their heads and said no. Master Chin Kung could not say either, because there are two requirements to do so. The first is to have unwavering belief and vows. The second is to let go of all desires, good or bad. We cannot go to the Pure Land if we have not met these requirements. If we have not yet let go.

We cannot let go because we are still clinging to something. Find it. We must find it! If we cannot, then even if we are born into the highest level of heaven, where we will live through eighty thousand cycles of creation, existence, and complete annihilation of the world, we will still be mired, still be lost in the

cycle of birth and death. What can we do? Find out what we are clinging to and LET GO! Let go of all attachments. Let go of all feelings of gain and loss. Let go of discriminating and wandering thoughts. Let go of the thought of how others treat us. Let go of the thought of those that owe us, of those we owe.

Only with purity of mind can we let go and only then can we definitely go the Pure Land. If we cannot do this, then we are truly lost of our vows, our beliefs are not sincere enough. No matter how many times we chant “Amitufo”, we will be unable to go to the Pure Land. For we are still clinging to one of the five desires of wealth, lust, fame, food or drink and sleep. Still discriminating between what we perceive as right or wrong. Greed for these will lead us into the downward spiral of the three bad realms. If we still have these then even if Buddha Amitabha came with all the Bodhisattvas to pull us to the Western Pure Land, we could not go.

There are many examples of people who were able to sever their greed, able to let go. A well-known one is that of Master Ying Ke, a monk who broke many rules. But he had one good quality. He knew that he had committed many bad deeds and that after his death we would go the hell realms. He asked his Dharma brothers what he could do. They showed a biography of people who had been born into the Western Pure Land.

Deeply moved by the accounts and feeling remorseful he sought seclusion in his room. He chanted continuously for three days and nights, without food, water or sleep. With deep sincerity of mind, he let go of everything and he received a response from Buddha Amitabha who told him that he still had ten more years to live. Buddha Amitabha told him to cultivate diligently for ten years and then he would come back to escort Master Ying Ke to the Pure Land. But the Master said, “I have many weaknesses and bad habits and am unable to resist temptation, I cannot wait ten more years so I wish to give them up and go with you now.” After three days, Buddha Amitabha came back to escort him to the Pure Land.

This example proved what was stated in the Amitabha Sutra, that is we chant sincerely and diligently from one to seven days, we could definitely achieve. The Pure Land method is easy to practice so this is not the problem. The problem is whether we truly want to go. If we hung a poster at the entrance to the chanting all that said, “After chanting for three days, you will go the Western Pure Land”, no one would come to the chanting hall because they would think that they would die in three days. And very few of us are ready to leave this world. And this is the main reason we do not go to the Pure Land.

The Buddha says very clearly in the sutra that we stay in the cultivation hall to attain “One Mind Undisturbed”, which consists of three main levels, the lowest of which is Constant Mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha. Reaching at least this level, we can go to the Pure Land. When we go we can be born into one of these three levels. Accomplishment of the top level enables us to decide when we will go the Pure Land. At that time we will go without any illness and may be in a standing or sitting position. Accomplishment of the middle level enables us to know when we will go to the Pure Land a few months in advance. Again, we may leave this world in a standing or a sitting position. In the lower level, we will know several days in advance of our death, when we will leave but we may become ill.

When some fellow practitioners asked Master Chin Kung what level his teacher, Mr. Lee had reached, he told them that he knew Mr. Lee had at least reached the top level of Conduct Mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha because he was able to decide when he would be born into the Pure Land. These levels are attainable by everyone, the question is whether we are willing to practice. Once we are, we can achieve this level. If we reach Constant Mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha, can we be born into the Pure Land? Yes, everyone can.

Many people were born into the Western Pure Land after a few years of Buddha Name Chanting. When this happens does this mean that their life expectancy has been reached? No, it means that they had reached the state of

purity of mind that enabled them to be born into the Pure Land and they had decided to go, not to wait. Most people who can go earlier choose not to remain in this world any longer, not to continue suffering. Those who choose to wait still have affinities with beings in this world, with those who accept and follow their guidance. But if, for example, the practitioner is giving lectures and no one in the audience is sincerely following his or her guidance, then there is no reason to stay.

This was the case of Mr. Lee, for although his audience was large, the few who had been following his guidance, were already capable of achievement, so he was able to leave. If just one had been following his teaching and still needed guidance, then he could not have gone. Since their first of the great four vows is to help all sentient beings, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will never abandon anyone, even if that being has harmed, slandered or even murdered them.

In ancient times way places had eight hours of cultivation and eight hours of learning. Our way place, here in Singapore, has two hours of lectures and twelve hours of Buddha Name Chanting every day. But we have not yet attained improvement in our cultivation because we have not yet attained the perfect understanding and this is why we cannot let go. Only when we have truly seen through to the true reality will we be able to let go.

Today, we still have obstacles due to this lack of understanding. Why can we not let go? We are still clinging to something. Because of this clinging, we are still mired, still lost in the cycle of birth and death, still lost in the ten realms of existence. We need to know that if we cannot transcend the cycle of birth and death, most of our time will be spent in the three bad realms. Why are we born into the animal realm? Because we were ignorant. Greed is the cause of the karma that results in our being born into the hungry ghost realm. And anger is the cause of our being born into the hell realm.

With enough good karma, we can go to the highest heavenly realm of Neither Thought nor Non-thought, where the beings have a life span of eighty thousand eons. But we also go the hell realms, where the beings have a life span of infinite eons. When compared to eighty thousand eons, the time spent in the hell realms is unimaginably long. And this is why Master Ying Ke was so frightened and wanted to leave this world just as soon as he could. When we consider the time spent in this world and the time spent in the other realms, our time here is as a flash of lighting, a drop of dew. It is inconsequential.

The cycle of birth and death is what is important, the major problem in front of us that we continually ignore. Even though Buddhas and Bodhisattvas try so hard to teach us the truth, we do not listen. We do not believe. We do not accept. So although these awakened beings try to help us, we still doubt, we reject their guidance. When will we truly be able to believe and accept this teaching? When we have listened for many year, then we will suddenly awaken.

Those who can awaken after one lecture are exceptional. They must be a manifestation of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. Most of us have to listen to a lecture and practice every day. After we listen to the lectures, contemplate the meanings and follow the teachings accordingly we will be able to achieve. But today, where can we find a teacher who can give us eight hours a day of lectures? We cannot. But what we can do is listen to one video or cassette tape several times every day. Do not listen to different tapes because by the time we finish the last tape we will have forgotten what the first tape said. Focus on only one. If we can continue to do this then after three years we will be able to attain some level of concentration, some degree of enlightenment.

After we listen to the lectures and truly understand the teaching then we will be able to apply the principles to our daily lives. If our understanding and cultivation can accord with the Buddhas teachings then we will know how to permanently transcend the cycle of birth and death as well as the ten realms.

The safest method to accomplish this is to seek birth into the Western Pure Land.

At breakfast one morning Fa Zhao the Fourth Patriarch of the Pure Land School looked into his bowl and saw an image. He asked his fellow monks about what he saw and they told him it was the Five Platform (Wu Tai) Mountain Way Place of Manjushri Bodhisattva. He then started to search for the place he had seen. When he found it, he joined ten thousand other beings who listened to a Dharma talk by Manjushri Bodhisattva. He then asked the Bodhisattva for guidance, "Since we are entering the Dharma Ending Age, which method is the most suitable for human beings?" Manjushri Bodhisattva answered that it was the Pure Land method. When the Fourth Patriarch asked how to practice this method, Manjushri Bodhisattva taught him to chant "Amitufo". After the Fourth Patriarch left the way place, he looked back to see it one more time, but it was gone. Then he understood that Manjushri Bodhisattva had come to teach him the most suitable method for our Dharma Ending Age.

Once we can go the Pure Land and meet Buddha Amitabha, we can tell him that we wish to go back to our world to help sentient beings. With his help we will never again be deluded or lost in the six realms. But, if we do not to the Pure Land to meet Buddha Amitabha then we will remain deluded. It is crucial that we understand this.

Master Chin Kung has been giving lectures for forty years. Every week he gave at least three talks. Now that he is here in Singapore he is giving a lecture every day. From age forty-five to over fifty, he spoke at least thirty hours every week. Who benefited the most? He did! He did not miss one lecture while the audience missed many. It is very difficult to cut off our bad habits. He spoke almost every day and urged the audience and thus himself to correct all bad habits. He has been giving dharma talks continuously for forty years; this is why he can cut off his bad habits. This is why he can let go.

Fellow practitioners and guests, please listen carefully. The Law of Cause and Effect is unchangeable, immutable. Even Buddhas and Bodhisattvas cannot alter it. Our greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance have resulted in disasters that are increasing in both frequency and severity and are approaching a scale that is impossible for us to imagine.

Everything arises from our mind. But just as we have given rise to the cause of this approaching disaster, we can also give rise to another, greater cause that can maybe reduce or possibly even prevent it from happening. We must replace thoughts of self with thoughts of all others. We must give up feelings of pride, the desires for fame and wealth. We must let go of thoughts of trying to control others. Let go of narrow-mindedness and biased viewpoints. Let go of criticizing, of blaming, of gossiping. Let go of the thought of those who owe us, of those we owe. We must let go!

Only by letting go can we return to purity and tranquillity. Only in this way, will our hearts become gentle, our minds become serene, as we give rise to the wisdom to accord with all beings, animate and inanimate. For only with gentle hearts and serene minds will we be able to solve our problems. The goodness that we can bring to others by using our loving-kindness and compassion is infinite, is boundless. And this is our best, our only way to bring true peace to our world. Not for ourselves but for the sake of all sentient beings.

## **THE TEN RECITATION METHOD**

The Ten-Recitation method is a simple, convenient, effective way to practice Buddha Name Recitation. It is especially suitable for those who find little time in the day for cultivation. Practicing this method helps us to regain

mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha and brings us peace and clarity in the present moment.

The practice begins first thing in the morning when we wake up. We sit up straight and clearly recite “Namo Amitabha’ ten times with an undisturbed mind, aloud or silently to ourselves. We repeat this process eight more times for the rest of the day. Altogether, we do one round of ten recitations, nine times a day, every day as follows:

1. Upon waking up
2. Before starting breakfast
3. After finishing breakfast
4. Before work
5. Before starting lunch
6. After finishing lunch
7. Before starting dinner
8. After finishing dinner
9. At bedtime

Altogether, this method is practiced nine times daily. The key is regularity; disruption of this practice will reduce its effectiveness. Without interruption, the cultivator will soon feel an increase in his/her purity of mind and wisdom.

Diligent practice of the Ten-Recitation Method, together with unwavering belief and vows, can ensure fulfilment of our wish to reach the Western Pure Land of Infinite Light. We hope everyone will practice accordingly.

**Namo Amitufo**