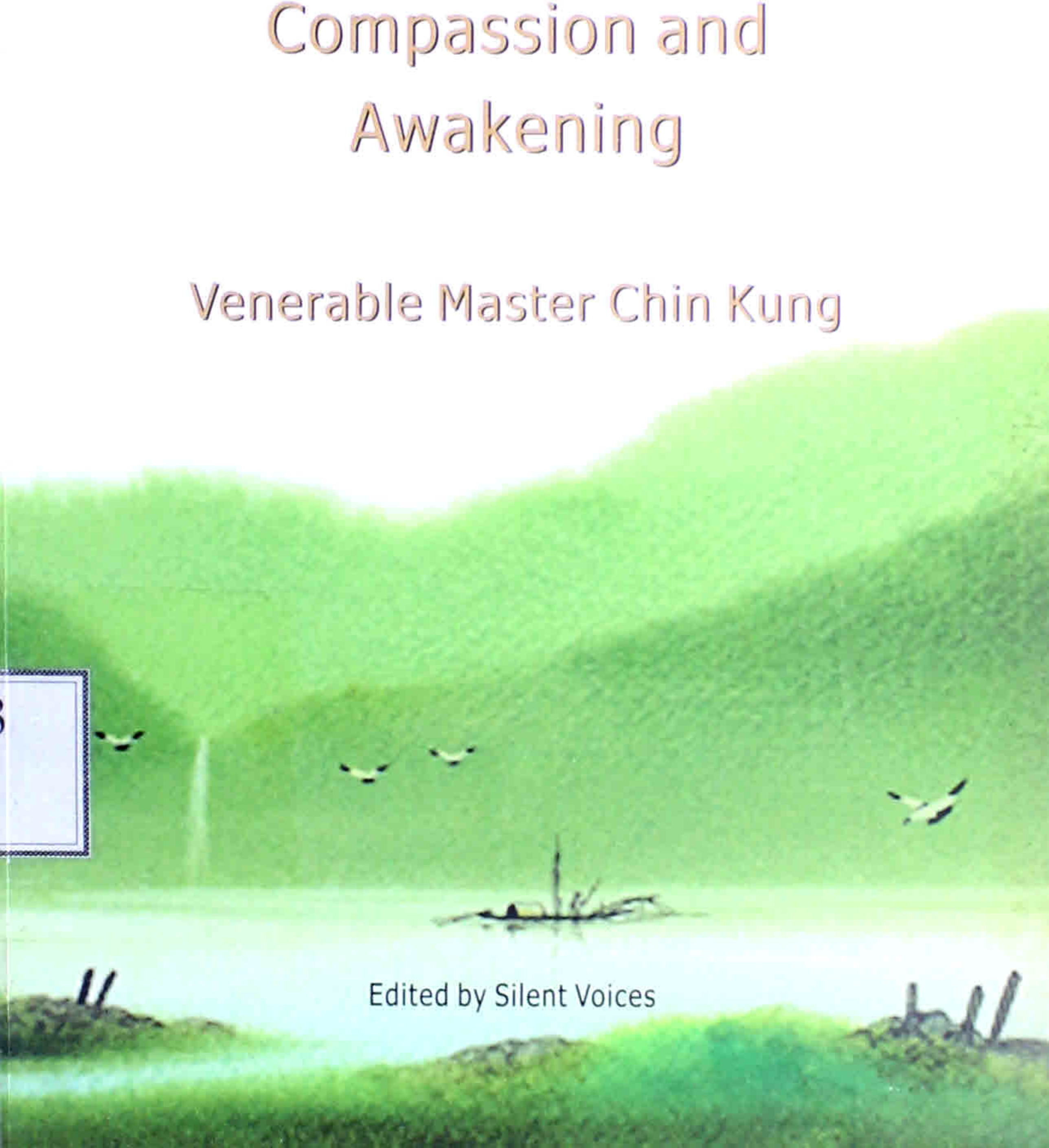
Buddhism : The Wisdom of Compassion and Awakening

Venerable Master Chin Kung



Edited by Silent Voices

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Venerable Master Chin Kung

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Remember the

Kindness of Others:

Repay the Kindness

with Gratitude

BUDDHISM: THE WISDOM OF COMPASSION AND AWAKENING

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

It is necessary for us to a have correct understanding before practicing Buddhism; otherwise, all the time spent in cultivation will be futile, as the most superior result will not be attained. Therefore, I would like to briefly explain the true nature of Buddhism.

Chinese history tells us that about three thousand years ago, Buddha Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism was born in Northern India. He lived seventy-nine years and dedicated forty-nine of them to teaching. In 67 AD, one thousand years after he entered Nirvana, these teachings were formally introduced into China.

Prior to acquiring a good knowledge of Buddhism, we need to understand the terms Buddha, Dharma, Buddhist Dharma and Buddhist teaching, as they are important to our cultivation. Buddha is a Sanskrit word, meaning "wisdom and enlightenment". Why was it transliterated as Buddha and not translated into wisdom and enlightenment? The meaning of "Buddha" is so profound and extensive that these two words were insufficient to cover the original meaning. Therefore, transliteration was used with further explanations.

In essence, Buddha means wisdom. In application or function, it means enlightenment. There are three levels of wisdom. First, "General and All Knowledge Wisdom" is the correct understanding of the noumena, or essence, of the universe. It is the wisdom of knowing the general aspect of all existences, the wisdom of Theravada sages. Second, "Differentiation Wisdom" is the wisdom that can correctly comprehend all the infinite phenomena of the universe, the wisdom of knowing the discriminative aspect of all existences, the wisdom of Bodhisattvas. How did these phenomena arise? From where? In what way? What were their results? Third, "Overall and Perfect Knowledge Wisdom" is the exhaustive and perfect perception and comprehension of the truth of life and the universe without the slightest doubt or error, the wisdom of Buddhas. Buddha Shakyamuni, possessing all three of these kinds of wisdom, completely understood the true reality of life and universe.

The function of wisdom is enlightenment. There are three classifications of enlightenment. First is "self-enlightenment", a state in which one possesses no erroneous thoughts, views, speech or behavior. Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas in Theravada Buddhism have attained this level of self-enlightenment,

but have not yet generated the Bodhi mind to help others achieve enlightenment. Second, is "enlightenment of self and others", a state in which one helps others to reach enlightenment after achieving his or her own. Bodhisattvas in Mahayana Buddhism have attained this level. Third is "Perfect Complete Enlightenment", a state in which one reaches perfection in both enlightenment for self as well as helping others to reach enlightenment. This is the state of Buddhas.

The Buddha told us that this perfect wisdom and virtue are innate to all beings. The sutras, recorded teachings of the Buddha, tell us that "all sentient beings can attain Buddhahood." and "every being possesses the wisdom and virtuous character of the Buddha". In other words, all beings are equal to Buddhas in nature. However, due to our discriminating and wandering thoughts and attachments, which are the root cause of all sufferings and disasters, we have temporarily lost our original Buddha nature. Thus, we continue being born into the endless cycle of birth and death.

The more we rid ourselves of these wandering thoughts and attachments, the more we will experience freedom from suffering, and the more wisdom and enlightenment we will uncover. Once we completely free ourselves from discriminating and wan-

dering thoughts and attachments, our fixations to certain ideas or objects, we will regain our lost Buddhahood; our original perfect enlightened state, our self-nature Buddha.

Possessing great wisdom and enlightenment enables us to truly know all that exists and all that is infinite. This includes matters and objects as tiny as a speck of dust or the finest hair on the human body, to those as great as the infinite universe. All of these are the objects of our perception, or wisdom and enlightenment.

The Buddha used the word Dharma to symbolize all these infinite phenomena. Buddhist Dharma or Principle, is the infinite wisdom and enlightenment, the perception of all things and laws in life and the universe. Chinese people often say that Buddhist Dharma is as infinite as the object perceived is infinite and the wisdom perceivable is infinite. This wisdom is innate to our self-nature.

The Buddha said, "Our innate perception and the objects in the universe perceived are ONE not TWO." When we think about it logically, if the Buddha's words are complete and perfect, then we can believe that this wisdom and enlightenment are ultimate and perfect. However, if perceived and perceivable are opposites, then wisdom can hardly be

complete and perfect, but rather it is limited.

The Buddha told us that knowable and known, perceivable and perceived are ONE not TWO. This is called the One True Dharma Realm, the most genuine, perfect and highest realm as explained to us in the Flower Adornment Sutra. The Western Pure Land of the Pure Land School also belongs to and is not separate from the One True Dharma Realm. This Western Pure Land, was created by Buddha Amitabha as an ideal place of cultivation as those who are born there are no longer subject to reincarnation within the six realms.

In 1923, a well-known Buddhist scholar, Mr. Jing-Wu Ou-Yang gave a speech at Nanjing Normal University in China, entitled "Buddhism is Neither a Religion Nor a Philosophy, but the Essential for Our Modern Time." It caused considerable sensation. His well-documented speech gave much conclusive support to the proper definition and viewpoint of Buddhism.

CHAPTER TWO
WHAT IS BUDDHISM

This question arises in all those who wish to better understand it. Buddhism is a most virtuous and perfect education directed by the Buddha towards all sentient beings in the universe. This education covers a boundless range of phenomena and principles that is much broader than what is currently studied in modern universities. In regards to time, it encompasses the past, present and future. In regards to space, it encompasses everything from our daily lives to the infinite universe. Buddhism is an education of the wisdom and understanding of life and the universe. It is not a religion. The teachings of Confucius concerns one lifetime. The teachings of the Buddha cover infinite lifetimes.

How can we tell that Buddhism is an education? Today, the terms teacher and student are only used in school. However, we call Buddha Shakyamuni, our Original Teacher. We call ourselves students, as did our predecessors in ancient China. This is unlike religions in which the god and his or her disciples do not have a teacher-student relationship, but rather a parent-child relationship. In Buddhism, however, it is clearly stated that the Buddha is the teacher and we

are the students. Bodhisattvas and we are class-mates; they were the Buddha's former students while we are his current ones.

Furthermore, a monk or nun is called He-shang, which is the transliteration of the Sanskrit word meaning a direct mentor who provides teachings and acts as our personal guide. We share a close teacher-student relationship with this individual. Temples, or Way Places, have only one He-shang. Teachers who teach on behalf of the He-shang are called Asheli. Their speech and behavior can be models for us to follow. Others who do not directly teach would be called Dharma masters or Fashi. They are like teachers whose lectures we do not attend or those who do not directly teach us. All these terms are characteristics of education and are not found in religion.

For further examples of how Buddhism is an education, we can examine Chinese way places where the activities are held. The way place is an educational institution combining Buddhist teaching and art, similar to the combination of a modern school and a museum. Nowadays, people pursue the arts in everything. Buddhism, however, practiced artistic teaching as early as three thousand years ago.

The staff organization of the way place further il-

lustrates the similarity to modern schools. The He-shang is equivalent to the principal of the school, deciding policies, making plans for courses of study and employing the teachers. Reporting to the He-shang are three associates or program executives, who are in charge of everything directly related to teaching, advising and disciplining, and general services. In China, a traditional way place was regarded as a Buddhist University. From this administrative structure, we can further see that Buddhism truly is an education.

CHAPTER THREE
THE FIVE FORMS OF BUDDHISM TODAY

Currently, there are at least five forms of Buddhism. The first form is the traditional Buddhism I have just discussed. It is the education of the Buddha's teachings. This original form is rarely seen today. The other four forms are deviations of this one.

The second form is religious Buddhism. Although originally not a religion, it has become one in the past few hundred years. Today, it is difficult to deny this. Why? The external form of Buddhism today is indeed that of a religion. It is no longer the education found in a traditional way place where cultivators had up to sixteen hours a day for both lessons and cultivation. The lessons included listening to lectures and discussions. The cultivation session included either Buddha name chanting or sitting meditation. Study and cultivation were used hand in hand to strive for the right and proper understanding and practice, to purify practitioner's minds and to eventually attain the state of enlightenment.

Since the monks and nuns spent sixteen hours a day on study and cultivation, there was little time for discriminating or wandering thoughts, and so achievement could be attained relatively quickly.

Unfortunately, this traditional form of Buddhism is seldom seen nowadays in way places for many of them have become a place to make offerings, to pray for blessings and to conduct memorial services. It is little wonder that people regard Buddhism as a religion.

The third form is philosophical or academic Buddhism often found as a course in college. This is inappropriate. Why? Buddhist education is a complete university in itself, including all branches of learning. But now it is reduced to merely a philosophical discipline. Regarding it as such, we miss the importance of the fact that the teachings are a necessity for all sentient beings. Why? Because these teachings can resolve all problems ranging from those in our current lives to those in the future, including even those of birth and death. Buddhism's scope is broad and profound and regarding it as merely an academic field of study is frankly, another deviation. These two forms cause no serious harm to society. Religions try to encourage people to be good. Philosophy strives to pursue truth and to gain knowledge.

The fourth and most recent deviation is Buddhism as a show. It consists of a few hours of music, singing and dancing with a short talk in between. However, the fifth form is a deviation that has gone too far,

that of the distortion of Buddhism into a cult. This deviated form has appeared in the last thirty to forty years. The exploitation of Buddhism by evil cults has gone too far. In the name of Buddhism, they take advantage of the weaknesses of human nature, creating chaos by cheating, and misleading people, endangering the safety of the public. Some of their propaganda and deeds can sound extremely enticing and appealing. However, if we join their activities, which doom us to ruin, by the time we realize our mistake, the damage will have already been done. It will then be too late to regret. Therefore, we need to choose wisely which form to practice in order to receive the true benefits.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE GOAL OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION

The Buddhist Educational System

What is the ultimate goal of the Buddha's teachings? It is to attain the Perfect, Complete Enlightenment. Transliterated from Sanskrit, it is called Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Out of respect, this phrase was maintained in its original form rather than translated. There are three stages within this enlightenment: "Proper Enlightenment", "Equal and Proper Enlightenment", and "Perfect, Complete Enlightenment".

The Buddha told us, that although scientists, philosophers and religious scholars may have reached a good understanding about life and the universe, this realization is neither complete nor proper. Why? Although they have obtained some understanding, they are far from having freedom from anxiety, from ending their afflictions. They indulge themselves in the Five Poisons of greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance and doubt. They remain mired in all the troubles of human relationships and are swayed by personal feelings. In other words, they are human.

If a person has severed greed, anger, ignorance,

arrogance, doubt and afflictions, the Buddha will acknowledge this person as having attained the first level, that of Proper Enlightenment. He or she will be called an Arhat, the initial academic degree in Buddhism. Arhats differ from Buddhas in the way that they use their mind. They use it in the same manner we do. The difference is that we still have afflictions while Arhats do not.

The next higher level of enlightenment is that of Equal and Proper Enlightenment, represented by Bodhisattvas. They resemble Buddhas in motivation but have not yet reached the same level of enlightenment. The minds of Bodhisattvas are genuine; they remain forever unchanged and are similar to those of Buddhas. Buddhas use the full and perfect true heart. Buddhas represent the highest level of enlightenment, which is the Perfect Complete Enlightenment.

In Buddhist classic literature, the perfect, true mind of a Buddha was symbolized by a full moon. The mind of a Bodhisattva was symbolized by a crescent moon, which was neither full nor perfect. And the mind of an arhat was symbolized by moonlight reflected from the surface of water, it is not real.

These three levels of enlightenment can be compared to our college educational system. The

level or degree of Arhat is similar to earning an undergraduate degree. The level of Bodhisattva is similar to earning a Master's degree and the level of Buddha is similar to earning a Doctorate's degree. The word Buddha is not exclusive to Buddha Shakyamuni, but is a common title for any being who has attained the perfect complete enlightenment. Thus, Buddha, Bodhisattva and Arhat are only names or titles to represent the levels of enlightenment or a degree we receive in Buddhism. And they are most certainly not deities to be worshiped.

So, a Buddha is one who has fully comprehended the truth of life and the universe and acquired the ultimate and perfect wisdom. This is also the goal of Buddhist education; to enable beings to attain this same level of wisdom. Therefore, Buddhism is an education of wisdom.

The Objectives of the Buddha's Teachings

The principle of Buddhism is to break through all superstitions and delusions. It is to resolve delusion to attain happiness and enlightenment, to eliminate suffering to gain serenity and purity of mind. What is delusion? When we do not thoroughly and properly understand the phenomenon around us, we tend to

be deluded, to have wrong ideas, which lead us to make mistakes. Then we suffer ill consequences as a result. However, if we have correct understanding about life and the universe, we will be free from mistakes in thought, judgement and behavior. Then our result, or effect, will be favorable. Thus, resolving delusion to attain enlightenment is the cause and eliminating suffering to attain happiness and purity is the effect.

Only through resolving superstition and delusion, can enlightenment be attained. This is the objective of the Buddha's teaching. This wisdom will enable all beings to differentiate true from false, proper from improper, right from wrong and good from bad. It can help us to establish a dynamic and caring attitude toward life and our surroundings. So, we can clearly see that Buddhism is neither passive nor obsolete, nor is it retreating from society. As said in the Buddha Speaks of the Infinite Life Sutra of Adornment, Purity, Equality and Enlightenment of the Mahayana School or the Infinite Life Sutra, Buddhism can perfectly solve all afflictions and problems. It enables us to obtain true and ultimate benefits by creating fulfilling lives, happy families, harmonious societies, prosperous nations and a peaceful world. These are the objectives of the Buddha's teachings

for our world now. The ultimate objectives of abandoning all worries thus transcending the six realms are even more incredibly wonderful. Therefore, we can see that it is an education that will enable us to attain truth, virtue, beauty, wisdom and genuine eternal happiness.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE ORIGINAL VOW OF EARTH TREASURE BODHISATTVA SUTRA

The Great Perfection

After understanding the goals and principles of the Buddha's teachings, we need to deepen our understanding of the Dharma. What is the Dharma? It is the true reality of life and the universe, all the teachings of the Buddhas, which are included in sutras. These ancient textbooks documented all of the Buddha's teachings and were recorded by his students. The most basic one of Mahayana Buddhism is the Original Vow of Earth Treasure Bodhisattva Sutra. It can be regarded as a textbook for first grade students, within which, the truth was clearly explained, not with spoken language but with emissions of light. The sutra, as told by Buddha Shakyamuni, begins with his emitting infinite bright lights called:

1. Great Perfection Brightness Cloud,
2. Great Compassion Brightness Cloud,
3. Great Wisdom Brightness Cloud,
4. Great Prajna Brightness Cloud,
5. Great Samadhi Brightness Cloud,
6. Great Auspicious Brightness Cloud,

7. Great Good Fortune Brightness Cloud,

8. Great Merit Brightness Cloud

9. Great Refuge Brightness Cloud,

10. Great Praise Brightness Cloud.

Although ten kinds are given, it does not mean that there are only ten. The number ten is regarded as a symbol of perfection, a complete cycle symbolizing infinity.

What is called perfection in the Earth Treasure Sutra is called infinity in the Infinite Life Sutra. Not only can life be infinite, everything can be infinite! However, of all the infinities, that of life is the most important. We may have boundless wealth and immeasurable good fortune, but how can we enjoy them if we do not have sufficient lifespans? Therefore, the Pure Land School uses "infinite life" to symbolize all infinities. In the Earth Treasure Sutra, the ten Brightness Clouds represent this concept. "One is all, and all is one" clearly explains the infinite cosmos and life.

Upon what did the Buddha base his teachings of life and the universe? First is the Great Perfection Brightness Cloud. The great perfection of Tibetan Buddhism is the true self-nature in Chinese Buddhism. The true self-nature is great perfection. The following nine clouds of compassion, wisdom, etc. are perfect, everything is perfect. This great perfection is our own

innate, true self-nature. It was from this initial point that the Buddha imparted the infinite teachings to us, thus revealing the true nature of all phenomena in the universe. Everything that the Buddha taught is innate to us. It is the original true self-nature within each of us. The purpose of his forty-nine years of teaching was to help us to learn how to live happy and fulfilling lives. This unique and complete education is for all sentient beings and is much more vast and extensive than our modern educational system.

People work hard everyday. What drives them to get up early in the morning and work long hours before coming home? It is the pursuit of prestige and wealth, especially wealth. Would people continue to work if they could not receive money or some degree of prestige after having worked for a whole day? Of course not. Most would become listless and unwilling to work. Therefore, for most people, the driving force in our society is wealth, followed by prestige.

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas desire neither wealth nor fame yet they work harder than we do. What is the driving force behind this conscientious teaching while expecting nothing in return? It is the second Brightness Cloud, the Great Compassion Brightness Cloud. It is like a mother's love for her children, es-

pecially her newborn baby, but it is more profound in depth. A mother does so out of natural love and compassion, asking for nothing in return. This love is called a heart of compassion. The compassion of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas towards all sentient beings is boundless, unconditional and universal. It is the eternal driving force that compels them to help all sentient beings. Therefore, the Great Compassion Brightness Cloud follows the Great Perfection Brightness Cloud.

In order to teach others, we practice cultivation as well as encouraging others to do likewise. We do so to sincerely introduce Buddhism to other people. What is our driving force? Compassion. But if we do so for wealth or fame, then it is purely business and this is totally wrong for it totally violates the very spirit of Buddhism.

In fact, the circulation of the teachings, including sutras and reference works should be unconditional. Copyrighted materials do not accord with the true spirit of Buddhism. Every time I am presented with a Buddhist book, I first check for the copyright page. If it says "This book is protected by copyright; any unauthorized printing of this book shall lead to punishment", I will not read the book. If asked why I do not want to read it, my answer is that any true and good

knowledge should benefit others unconditionally and that reprinting should be allowed. It would be a waste of time and energy to read copyrighted books. Only the writings of those who are broad-minded and kind-hearted and who sincerely practice what they teach deserve to be read and studied. How can we expect a narrow-minded, profit-seeking person to write good things and conclude them with the great perfection?

Compassion is built on rationale and is free of emotions. To be otherwise, it is delusion and therefore is wrong. There are two Buddhist sayings, "Compassion is the essence; convenient means is the way to accommodate people with different capacities". The other seemingly says the complete opposite, "Compassion often incurs misfortunes and convenience often leads to immorality". The reason behind this apparent contradiction is that if we ignore rationality and instead yield to emotion, compassion then often results in misfortune while doing favors for someone gives rise to immorality. Hence, this is followed by the Great Wisdom Brightness Cloud, the third of the ten great perfections. Perfect wisdom gives rise to perfect compassion. Wisdom is the method of convenience. Only by wisely utilizing various methods of wisdom and compassion, can we

do, although they may not all use the term meditation.

Pure Land Buddhism calls it One Mind Undisturbed or purity of mind. Tibetan Buddhism explains it as Three mystic practices, the three karmas of body, mouth, mind corresponding to those of the Buddha. Used here corresponding means concentration. We can see that various schools emphasize the same principles. They simply use different terms to describe it. Therefore, since all lead to the same goal, all methods are equal and no one method is better than another.

We can choose whichever method best fits our manner of living and level of achievement and understanding. The most important point is to concentrate on just one method. The more methods we try to follow, the more confused we will become. The more confused we are, the more difficult it is to succeed. This is very important, as samadhi or deep concentration, is the key to success in our learning and cultivation. We explain these as the Three Learnings of precepts or self-discipline, deep concentration and wisdom. Self-discipline leads to deep concentration. From deep concentration arises wisdom. Therefore, intuitive wisdom arises from deep concentration. This deep concentration in our self-

nature is called the Great Samadhi Brightness Cloud.

Of the ten brightness clouds, the first five explain fundamental principles and the latter five explain the methods. The fundamental principles are the basis of Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings. The following are the five methods.

First is the Great Auspicious Brightness Cloud. What does auspicious mean? For most of us, auspicious means to get what we deserve. If we obtain what we do not deserve, then it is not auspicious. The meaning of auspicious in Buddhism is much more profound: throughout the universal existence, nothing is beyond our knowledge and experience. This is great auspiciousness. For example, when we are mindful of Buddha Amitabha and vow to be born into the Western Pure Land, we will attain birth into the Western Pure Land. If we vow to be born into the Flower Adornment World, we will attain the stage of awakening of Buddha Vairocana. This is the original meaning of auspicious.

In our world, Buddha Shakyamuni taught different methods for different levels of understanding and this is the utmost auspiciousness. First, the Buddha's teachings never contradict the true reality of life and the universe. Second, the Buddha always adapted his teachings to fit the audience's level of compre-

hension. His teachings would be a failure if they proved to be incomprehensible for the listeners or if they were too simple and boring. Neither of these would be auspicious. Therefore, the appropriate teaching is most auspicious. The Buddha conveys all he wishes to: we hear all that we can understand and absorb. This is the utmost, the greatest and perfect auspiciousness.

Nowadays, people pursue wealth, knowledge, health and long life. This is called good fortune. If the Buddha asks us to learn and practice Buddhism but we do not receive what he said we would, then we will reject the teachings. Why? If we cannot get what we wish for now, how can we believe we will receive what is promised to us for the next life? It is all too distant and uncertain. When will we get to enjoy the promised great reward? However, if we can receive benefits now, we will be much more likely to believe in the promise of even greater rewards in the future. By truly practicing Buddhism, we will attain all that we wish for.

This is similar to a tree blossoming and bearing fruits. Only when we see the beautiful blossoms, will we believe there will be good fruits. If the flower does not bloom, how can we believe there will be fruit? Therefore, we have the Great Good Fortune

Brightness Cloud following the Great Auspicious Brightness Cloud. We must cultivate the cause before we can attain the effect.

The next guiding principle is represented by the Great Merit Brightness Cloud. All Buddhas spent a long period of time, one hundred eons, cultivating good fortune after attaining Buddhahood. Why? A Buddha cannot help sentient beings if he himself does not have good fortune. People will not believe in a teacher who talks of it but obviously lacks it. However, when the teacher has it and explains that it comes from cultivation, then people will listen and follow his or her teachings. Therefore, only if the teacher has good fortune and virtue in addition to wisdom can he or she help sentient beings. Thus, the Buddha taught us to cultivate both good fortune and wisdom. However, good fortune is different from merit in that merit is the one that helps us to transcend the cycle of birth and death. We accumulate merit by practicing the Three Learnings of precepts or self-discipline, deep concentration and wisdom.

In our practice, we need to rely on the next principle of The Great Refuge Brightness Cloud. This is not what is usually thought of as taking refuge in the Triple Jewels of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Rather, it is to return to and rely upon the

Triple Jewels, the great perfection of our self-nature.

The Great Praise Brightness Cloud symbolizes educating others about Buddhism, praising the perfect and infinite merits and virtue of the self-nature. What does Buddhism teach us? To attain our perfect self-nature. Zen Buddhism often says that we should search for the original state of our perfect self-nature.

In summary, Buddha Shakyamuni emitted light at the beginning of the Earth Treasure Sutra. This light has many more infinite, boundless meanings than the ten brightness clouds discussed. The first five brightness clouds are the Great Perfection of self-nature and the last five are the function of the self-nature. These ten comprise the basis of the Buddha's teachings and are to be found in many sutras, often represented by emissions of light. Many people read of the brightness clouds without any real understanding of the profound meanings within. Not only this sutra, but also all sutras start and flow from the Great Perfection. We will benefit much more from reading sutras once we understand these representations.

The Great Perfection of Mahayana Buddhism

The sequence of practice in Mahayana Bud-

dhism is represented in China by the four Great Bodhisattvas: Di Tzang (Earth Treasure) of Jiuhua Mountain; Guan Yin (Great Compassion) of Putuo Mountain; Wen Shu Shi Li (Manjushri) of Wutai Mountain; and Pu Xian (Universal Worthy) of Emei Mountain.

Earth Treasure means stored treasure of the great mother earth, which represents our mind. Without the earth, nothing could survive. So, the Buddha used the earth as a metaphor for our mind, which is the Great Perfection. It encompasses infinite compassion, wisdom, intuitive wisdom, auspiciousness, good fortune, merit and virtue. Therefore, all that the Buddha told us in the sutras is infinite, is the Great Perfection. Understanding this will enable us to find the boundless meanings within.

The Earth Treasure Sutra explains that we begin our learning and practice by being filial to our parents and respectful to our teachers and elders. Buddhism is an education of honoring teachers and revering their teachings, which is based on the founda

tion of filial piety. How can we expect a person who is not filial to his or her parents to respect his or her teachers? A teacher, regardless of learning and capabilities, cannot impart knowledge to a student who does not respect or listen.

Therefore, only when we honor teachers and re-

vere their teachings can we truly succeed in our learning of Buddhism. The Original Vow of Earth Treasure Bodhisattva Sutra is the sutra of the filial piety, which is the very heart of the Great Perfection. All other perfections arise from it. From here, we extend this loving and caring for parents to respecting teachers and elders.

We keep expanding from here until we respect and care for all sentient beings without discrimination or attachment. This is the enhancement and extension of Earth Treasure Bodhisattva and is the teaching of Guan Yin Bodhisattva. Therefore, without filial piety, there would be no great compassion. This is similar to building a house. The second floor must be built upon the first floor. In being filial to parents and showing compassion for all other beings, we should not use emotions. Rather we need to base this compassion on rationale and wisdom. Only in this way can we attain positive results.

Next is the third Bodhisattva, Manjushri, who symbolizes wisdom and Universal Worthy Bodhisattva who symbolizes the practice of filial piety, respect, compassion and wisdom in our daily lives. If we practice these principles when interacting with others, matters and objects, then we ourselves are Universal Worthy Bodhisattva.

The teachings of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva are perfect. As the Flower Adornment Sutra tells us, we cannot attain Buddhahood if we do not follow this teaching. Why? This Bodhisattva is perfect in every thought, every vow and every deed. Without true wisdom, the great vow of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva cannot be fulfilled.

These four great Bodhisattvas exemplify this understanding and represent the perfection of Mahayana Buddhism. Therefore, from Earth Treasure Bodhisattva, we learn filial piety and respect, from Guan Yin Bodhisattva, we learn great compassion, from Manjushri Bodhisattva we learn great wisdom and from Universal Worthy Bodhisattva we learn the great vows and conduct.

CHAPTER SIX

THE FIVE GUIDELINES

Buddha Shakyamuni used innumerable methods to correspond with the level of attainment of his listeners. However, regardless of the particular method, he never deviated from the Great Perfection. In other words, all his teachings arose from the self-nature. Consequently, all methods are equal. It is like the harmony between the leading role and the supporting roles in the Flower Adornment Sutra. If Buddha Shakyamuni is the leading role then all the other Buddhas are the supporting roles. When Buddha Amitabha is the leading role then Buddha Vairocana will be the supporting role. Any Buddha can take the leading role.

Harmonious cooperation between the roles is also found among the Bodhisattvas. If we regard Guan Yin Bodhisattva as the leading role in our learning of Buddhism, then all the other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are the supporting roles. If Earth Treasure Bodhisattva takes the leading role then Guan Yin Bodhisattva or others take the supporting role.

This principle applies to sutras as well. When we choose the Infinite Life Sutra as our primary sutra then all the others become secondary. If we take the

Diamond Sutra as the primary then the Infinite Life Sutra and the Flower Adornment Sutra become the secondary. All Bodhisattvas and all sutras are equal in nature. Whichever primary method is chosen it is praised as number one. However, saying that a certain method is number one does not mean that the others are less important or effective. If we forget this, then we commit a serious offense. What offense? Praising oneself and belittling others.

Consider the origin of the Visualization Sutra. When Queen Vaidehi suffered from overwhelming family misfortune, she bitterly said to Buddha Shakyamuni: "Life is filled with suffering. Is there not a place without suffering? I wish to live in such a world". Through his supernatural abilities, Buddha Shakyamuni displayed for the queen all the worlds of all the Buddhas in the universe. She vowed to be born into Buddha Amitabha's Western Pure Land, the world of Ultimate Bliss and requested that Buddha Shakyamuni teach her how to accomplish this.

He taught her to practice the Three Conditions explaining that they were the fundamental causes of attaining Buddhahood for the Buddhas of the past, present and future. Therefore, they are a crucial part and foundation of our practice. The Three Conditions are the basis of Buddhism and crucial in our at-

tainment of Buddhahood.

The Three Conditions

To be a virtuous person, it is necessary to first follow the Three Conditions. In sutras, we often see the phrase "good men and good women". What are the requirements for being good? Meeting each of the eleven principles contained in the three Conditions. Thus, we will see that the requirements are stringent. Good men and good women in the heaven and human realms need only meet the First Condition. Theravada sutras only require practitioners to fulfill the First and Second Conditions. But for Mahayana practitioners, good men and good women must meet all three. As we see in Mahayana sutras such as the Earth Treasure Sutra and the Infinite Life Sutra, it is to live our lives in accordance with the eleven principles.

Failure to satisfy any one of the principles would prohibit a person from being considered good. Regardless of what the Buddha taught, the methods of learning and cultivation or the true reality of life and the universe, all accord with the Great Perfection. The eleven principles of the Three Conditions are likewise perfect in every word.

The First Condition: The Good Fortune Required to be a Human or Heavenly Being

The First Condition includes:

1) Being filial to our parents,
2) Being respectful to our teachers and elders,
3) Being compassionate and not killing any living beings and
4) Following the Ten Good Conducts.

Consider the first and second principles of being filial to our parents and respectful to our teachers and elders. The Chinese character for filial piety, "Xiao", is comprised of two parts. The top part "old" means the previous generations and the bottom part "children" means the future generations. This demonstrates that the previous generations and the future generations are actually one entity. They are ONE rather than TWO. In our modern world, the existence of the generation gap has resulted in parents and children being TWO instead of ONE. This gap contradicts the principle of filial piety, which has no generation gap.

The past had its own past; the future will have its own future. The past had no beginning and the future will have no end. They are one. Filial Piety reaches beyond time and extends throughout the

universe. In other words, it encompasses the entire universe. Who can practice the principle of filial piety to perfection? Only a Buddha can do so. Without having attained Buddhahood, we cannot achieve the Great Perfection in practicing filial piety.

Filial piety has profound meanings in Buddhism. It means to take care of parents physically, mentally and to fulfill their wishes. To further extend and enhance our respect and care for our parents, we have compassion for all beings in this world. As stated in a precept sutra, "All men are my father; all women are my mother". This is the broadening of our mind of filial piety so that it encompasses all beings in the universe, in the past, present and future.

Mahayana teachings are based on the principle of filial piety for without it there would be no principle of respecting teachers. It is illogical that we are not filial to our parents, yet respectful to our teachers. We could have ulterior intentions, for example, flattering the teacher to obtain a better grade. Filial piety and respect go together. At the same time that we are filial to our parents, we also elevate that filial piety to being respectful to our teachers. Only when we realize this truth will we truly appreciate the value of the principle of filial piety. The Earth Treasure Sutra is the Buddha's teaching of filial piety for only when

we treat our parents with such respect can we uncover the infinite treasures within our own self-nature.

Being filial toward our parents is a virtue of our self-nature. Only virtuous acts can uncover our self-nature. It is the first and most fundamental principle of the Three Conditions. The Chinese respect ancestors even though they are distant from them by hundreds, even thousands of years. They memorialize them on important festivals. Why? Their ancestors and they are all one entity. There is no gap between them. Sincerely memorializing our ancestors corresponds with our self-nature. If we remember and respect our ancestors, we will certainly be filial to our parents. When we are filial toward our parents, it naturally follows that we will respect our teachers.

When we disappoint our parents by not respecting teachers, not following their instructions and not studying hard, we violate the principle of filial piety. Also, siblings would do well to live in harmony. Not getting along with brothers and sisters will cause parents to worry thus also violating the principle of filial piety. By getting along with others at work, meeting responsibilities and abiding by laws, we will not cause our parents to worry, thus we accord with the principle of filial piety. These are a true perfection of virtue. Buddha Shakyamuni taught us to be-

gin our learning from here. He is our original teacher from three thousand years ago. If we respect a teacher from this far in the past, how would we not respect our current teachers?

When we pay respect to an image of the Buddha, we are not worshipping him. We respect the image as a representation of our Original Teacher and therefore we pay our debt of gratitude to him. This is why the followers of the Buddha respect the Buddha's images as well as memorial tablets of ancestors. This practice has a far-reaching and widespread educational significance, for at the sight of them, we remember our obligation of caring for and respecting our parents, teachers and elders.

The Earth Treasure Sutra tells us about compassion after explaining the Great Perfection. Compassion is the third principle of the First Condition. Compassion is also a virtue of self-nature and crucial to our practice. When the virtue of filial piety and respect for parents and teachers is expanded, it becomes compassion. Compassion includes not killing any living being. This statement has profound meanings. Without a thorough comprehension of the Earth Treasure Sutra, we cannot understand the true meaning behind not killing any living being.

Of all bad karmas, that resulting from killing is

most serious. Why? All living beings have the natural instinct of fearing and evading death. Although killing is the direct retribution of the victim who killed the present killer in a previous lifetime, the current victim does not know this. He or she would not think, "I killed this person so now this person is killing me". If only the victim could understand this, there would be no anger at the retribution. Instead, the present victim will think, "You are killing me now. I will kill you next." This vengeance will be repeated in the endless cycle of birth and death and the mutual hatred will grow stronger and stronger.

This is the most terrible of all the bad offenses and is why we need so urgently to practice compassion for all beings. There are infinite ways to practice compassion, but in the Three Conditions, the Buddha particularly stressed not killing any living being. In other words, killing is an ultimate act of being unfilial towards our parents and disrespectful towards our teachers and elders.

The Buddha taught the basic Five Precepts and the first of these is also the first of the Ten Good Conducts, do not kill. Continuing to kill is to completely disregard his teachings and is an ultimate act of disrespect. This disrespect is tantamount to being unfilial to our parents. Consequently, if we ignore these

instructions and kill, we are neither compassionate nor filial.

The fourth principle is "Following the Ten Good Conducts" which are criteria for good behavior and are to be found in many cultures and religions throughout the world. Buddha Shakyamuni told us that if we practice these good conducts, we would not fall into the three bad realms. Instead, we would likely to be born into the heaven realms if we practice these good conducts diligently. If we achieve the deep concentration along with the four immeasurable minds of loving-kindness, compassion, joy and letting go, we will rise to an even higher level of the heavens, the Heaven of Form and the Heaven of Formless.

The Buddha groups the Ten Good Conducts into three major categories: physical, verbal and mental. Physically, we are prohibited from killing, stealing and committing sexual misconduct. Regardless of their good deeds or their ability in deep concentration, those who have sexual desires can only rise as far as the Heaven of Desire. This Heaven has six levels; the higher we rise, the lighter these desires.

A person who sincerely cultivates and has thus attained even the lowest level of deep concentration would be able to suppress sexual desires. At this

level the Five Desires of wealth, lust, fame, food or drink and sleep would not arise. Although the desires are not completely eradicated, they can be suppressed by deep concentration. Only the one, who can resist temptations of desire, can attain this state and thus be born into the heavens above the First Level Meditation Heaven. Understanding this explains why attainment throughout this process is so difficult. When we are attempting to practice, we can first ask ourselves, "Can I resist the Five Desires of wealth, lust, fame, food or drink and sleep"? If we yield to temptation, we will not be able to rise to this level of heaven.

The second good conduct is to not steal. For instance, some people like to evade paying their income taxes. This is equivalent to stealing money from the country and the retribution from this is much serious than that from stealing private property. When we steal one person's property, we only have a debt to that one person. But if we steal property of the country, we will have a hopelessly insurmountable debt because then we will have stolen from and thus owe every taxpayer. For example, the United States has a population of well over two hundred million. Two hundred million creditors! Just imagine the consequences! Therefore, a sincere

practitioner must be a law-abiding person devoted to meeting public responsibilities. One who does not violate the good deeds of no killing, stealing or sexual misconduct conducts themselves properly.

There are four verbal good conducts; no lying, abusive language, bearing tales and seductive words. First, do not lie. To lie is to cheat deliberately, it is dishonesty. Second, do not make rude or abusive remarks. Those who have this bad habit speak with no sense of propriety; their words can be irritating or very harmful

Third, do not talk about others behind their back for this sows discord among people. A person says to Sam, "Tom has said something bad about you." And then this person says to Tom, "Sam has said something bad about you." Whether this person does so deliberately or unintentionally, he is bearing tales and gossiping. In our society, many people do this unintentionally. At times, so many people participate in this that the subject becomes distorted beyond recognition. A well-meant message or remark may become just the opposite after everyone who passes it adds or omits something This can cause serious consequences ranging from discord among individuals to war among nations.

Fourth, do not use seductive words. These can

sound very sweet and enticing but often conceal bad intentions. Just look at many of today's movies, singers and performers. They sound beautiful and look good but what are they teaching people to do? To lie, steal, or kill. Fifth, do not commit sexual misconduct.

Finally, there are three mental good conducts; no greed, anger or ignorance. Greed includes being stingy, reluctant to give of our belongings, our knowledge to help others. This can become the greatest obstacle to overcome in our practice. The Buddha taught giving as a way to eradicate our greed. Some practitioners are able to resist any worldly temptations; however, they cannot resist the desire to learn many methods of practice. So, they have not truly rid themselves of their greed.

The Buddha has taught us to let go of all desires and greed. He did not ask us to turn to new objects for our greed. In the past, we sought worldly joys, now we seek and attach to Buddhist knowledge. The mind of greed is still there. Therefore, whether for worldly life or for Buddhist knowledge, we would do well not to be greedy. Greed is the source of all misdeeds and wrongdoing.

Greed leads to resentment and anger. Why? We become resentful and angry when our greed is

not satisfied and this brings about immense worries and afflictions. Greed is the cause of the karma that results in us being born into the hungry ghost realm. By failing to rid ourselves of the resentment and anger caused by greed, we can be born into the hell realm. Ignorance, having no wisdom, results in us being born into the animal realm. In both worldly teachings and in Buddhism there is truth and falsehood, justice and injustice, right and wrong, good and bad. An ignorant person cannot tell the difference between them. Intentional or unintentional, he or she often confuses false and truth, bad and good.

The Three Poisons are the biggest obstacles to our attainment of enlightenment. Buddhism, especially the Zen School, advocates starting our practice from the root, the mind. To start from this root, we need to sever our greed, anger and ignorance.

These three physical, four verbal and three mental deeds comprise the Ten Good Conducts. If we are filial to and care for our parents, respect and serve our teachers and elders, and are compassionate without any killing and practice the Ten Good Conducts, we will be regarded as good people by society. However, we still cannot be called "good men and good women" in the Buddhist sense because the criterion for this are higher than just these

four principles. Thus, it is not easy for us to achieve even the basic standards.

The Second Condition: The Good Fortune Required to be a Theravada Sage

The second of the Three Conditions is:

5) Taking the Three Refuges

6) Abiding by precepts laws and customs

7) Behaving in a proper and dignified manner

Mahayana Buddhism is based on the foundation of Theravada Buddhism, which was introduced into China during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, thirteen hundred years ago, but soon gave way to Mahayana Buddhism. Why did the Theravada teachings decline in China? In ancient times, people who learned Buddhism had already been nurtured in the Taoist and Confucian teachings, which were enough to replace the Theravada teachings. Since the Taoist and Confucian teachings were also similar to those of the Mahayana teachings, it was natural for the Chinese to accept them. Thus, the Theravada teachings were not practiced as Taoism and Confucianism served as the foundation of Mahayana teachings.

Consequently, Theravada teachings never really

developed in China. Today, people learn and practice Mahayana but ignore Theravada Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. This is similar to ignoring the foundation and first floor when building a house. Such an attempt would not work because the house would be "a cabin in the sky". This is why we see so few Buddhist successors today.

Theravada Buddhism is established on the human-heavenly basis, which includes being filial to our parents, respectful to our teachers and elders, compassionate to others and diligent in practicing the Ten Good Conducts. With this base, we can meet the criteria to begin learning and practicing Buddhism. To be a Buddhist practitioner, after we have acquired basic understanding, we pay respect to the teacher and take the Three Refuges of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, the fifth principle of the Three Conditions. We pay respect to Buddha Shakyamuni and express the wish to follow his teachings for the rest of our lives. From this point on we will have the standards for changing our thought speech and behavior.

Taking Refuge in the Triple Jewels is to take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. In ancient times everyone understood the meaning of the Triple Jewels. Today however, many people mis-

understand the meaning. When they hear the word "Buddha", they think of an image. When they hear the word "Dharma", they think of a sutra. When they hear the word "Sangha", they think of monks and nuns.

The Sixth Patriarch of Zen, Master Hui-Neng, foresaw the possibility that people in the future would misinterpret the meaning of the Triple Jewels. Therefore, whenever he taught he would not use the words Buddha, Dharma or Sangha. Instead, he used enlightenment, proper understanding and purity. These terms are more easily understood and less subject to misunderstanding. They are called the Triple Jewels of Self-nature, which are the true principles for us to follow. If we become misled here and follow an individual master, we will remain misled from now on. If that happens, how can we achieve any real attainment?

When we take refuge in the Triple Jewels, we first return to and rely upon the Buddha. For uncountable aeons, we have been wandering helplessly and miserably in the six realms. Now we have met a good teacher who shows us that we need to return from our confusion, delusion and erroneous thinking and to rely upon the awakening of our self-nature. Our self-nature was originally awakened. So, the

Buddha that we rely upon is not to be found outside of ourselves but is innate to our self-nature. The Pure Land School teaches "Buddha Amitabha and the Pure Land are already within our self-nature". Buddha Amitabha, Buddha Shakyamuni and all Buddhas manifest from our self-nature. Therefore, what we rely upon is the Buddha or awakening of our self-nature. From now on we should be awakened and never again be deluded or filled with attachments, for if we do so then we have not turned back.

Next we return to and rely upon the Dharma, of which our thoughts and viewpoints of life and the universe completely accord with true reality. This treasure is only found within our self-nature. Buddha Shakyamuni taught us to return form erroneous thoughts and viewpoints and to rely only upon those that are proper. This is to return and rely upon the Dharma. The Buddha did not tell us to blindly follow him but rather to be a dauntless independent individual and to find the truth by ourselves.

Next we return to and rely upon the Sangha, which represents purity of the Six Senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and idea. Most of us will find that our six senses become polluted when they encounter external surroundings. When these are pleasing, we develop a heart of greed, which is pol

lution. When these are displeasing, we develop a heart of resentment and anger, which is pollution as well. We need to remember that the Five Desires of wealth, lust, fame, food or drink and sleep and the Seven Human Emotions of joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hate and desire are impurities of the heart. The Buddha told us that originally our self-nature was pure without impurities. We need to eradicate all impurities and rely upon our pure heart. This is to return and rely upon the Sangha.

In summary, taking refuge in the Buddha means being awakened and not deluded. Taking refuge in the Dharma means having proper viewpoints. Taking refuge in the Sangha means being pure and not polluted. These are the Triple Jewels of Self-nature that the Buddha taught us for our practice: awakening, proper viewpoints and purity. From now on, we need to forget our past and return to and rely upon these Triple Jewels and use them to correct our thoughts, speech and behavior.

When we attain one of the Three Refuges, we achieve the other two as well. Think about it. Will an awakened person have erroneous viewpoints? Will this person have an impure heart? Can a person with an impure heart and erroneous viewpoints attain awakening? The Buddha has shown us three

guidelines to uncover our original self-nature and to attain Buddhahood. This is similar to a way place with three entrances, we only need to step through one and we are in!

Zen Buddhism uses the sudden enlightenment method to uncover our self-nature. However, only cultivators with superior capability and purity of mind can achieve attainment in this way. For example, the Sixth Patriarch of Zen, Master Hui-Neng only taught students with superior capabilities.

Other schools such as the Tiantai, Flower Adornment and Three Sastras (Discourse) Schools use the proper thoughts and viewpoints method by correcting thoughts and behavior following the guidelines in the sutras. However, this requires endurance and much practice because achievement takes a long time and we have to study many sutras.

The Pure Land and Tibetan Schools, however, emphasize practice through purity of mind through cultivation. It is logical that these two schools are popular today in the Dharma Ending Age. However, the Pure Land School does not require unusually superior abilities or a long period of time for practice. As it stresses the Buddha Name Recitation Method to attain purity of mind, it is much easier to practice and to reach attainment in than the Tibetan School.

Again, although the doors to the way place are different, each of them will give us entry. Therefore, all methods are equal and that the three methods of enlightenment, proper thoughts and viewpoints, and purity are in essence the same.

Thus, we need to acquire a clear understanding of the Triple Jewels of Self-nature and to know which method to choose as the basis for our practice. Only in this way will we find genuine refuge. Otherwise, we will remain ignorant of where to take refuge and upon what to rely.

Although we may now have more understanding of the Triple Jewels, we may still be confused as to how to practice them in our daily lives. Each school has its own representations of the Triple Jewels. For example, in the Flower Adornment School they are Vairocana Buddha, the Flower Adornment Sutra, Manjushri Bodhisattva and Universal Worthy Bodhisattva and the forty-one Great Bodhisattvas, respectively. They are our role models to emulate.

The Triple Jewels of the Tiantai School are Buddha Shakyamuni, the Lotus Sutra and the Bodhisattvas named in the sutra, respectively. In the Pure Land School they are Buddha Amitabha, The Infinite Life Sutra, the other four sutras and one sastra or commentary; Guan Yin Bodhisattva, Great Strength

Bodhisattva, Manjushri Bodhisattva and Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, respectively.

We learn compassion from Guan Yin Bodhisattva and single-minded concentration from Great Strength Bodhisattva. "The Chapter on the Perfect and Complete Realization of Great Strength Bodhisattva" in the Surangama Sutra tells us how Great Strength Bodhisattva concentrated on the Buddha Name Chanting Method from the time he took refuge until the time he attained enlightenment. He taught us that the proper way to chant is the complementary practice of concentrating the six sense organs and continuous pure mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha. Pure mindfulness is to chant without "doubt, intermingling with other thoughts and methods", to chant with a pure mind. Continuous means uninterrupted with one sentence after another. This is the key to success in the practice of Buddha Name chanting, which was taught by Great Strength Bodhisattva.

Mr. Xia wrote in his book entitled "Essentials for Practice of the Pure Land School" that Great Strength Bodhisattva was the founding patriarch of the Dharma realm. Initially, his comment greatly surprised me because I had never heard this before. Later, I understood what he meant and greatly ad-

mired him for his perception. Throughout the universe, Great Strength was the first Bodhisattva to concentrate solely on the Buddha Name Chanting Method.

When Buddha Shakyamuni manifested in our Saha world, the first sutra he taught was the Flower Adornment Sutra. In this assembly, the Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva concluded the sutra and guide us to the Western Pure Land. Thus, Universal Worthy Bodhisattva is the founding patriarch of our Saha world. Then, after the Infinite Life Sutra was introduced into China, Master Hui-Yuan of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, which was sixteen hundred years ago, built a cultivation hall and gathered together one hundred twenty-three fellow practitioners. They exclusively studied the Infinite Life Sutra and practiced the Buddha Name Chanting Method. Therefore, the three founding patriarchs of the Pure Land School are Great Strength Bodhisattva of the Dharma realms, Universal Worthy Bodhisattva of the Saha world and Master Hui-Yuan of China.

Years ago, my late teacher, Mr. Bing-Nan Lee, of Taizhong in Taiwan, suggested that I should introduce the Pure Land Buddhism to the west. I established a Way Place in Dallas, Texas and called it the "Flower Adornment Society", the same name I used

in Taiwan. When I brought statues of Buddha Amitabha, Guan Yin Bodhisattva and Great Strength Bodhisattva from China, they were too small for the twenty-one foot hall. I thought that it would be better to have larger paintings with western features to symbolize the introduction of the Pure Land Buddhism to the west.

Just one day before my departure for the United States, I received some paintings with the request that they be taken to Dallas. I still do not know who the donor was. The paintings were of Buddha Amitabha, Guan Yin Bodhisattva and Great Strength Bodhisattva. What a surprise! Buddha Amitabha had Indian features, Guan Yin Bodhisattva had Chinese features and Great Strength Bodhisattva had western features! The donor had the same idea that I had. The western features of the founding patriarch of the Dharma Realm symbolized the arrival of the Pure Land Buddhism in the United States. Thus, the Pure Land Society was set up in the west. Mr. Lian-Ju Xia had been the first to suggest that a Pure Land Society be formed. But it was not to be in China, but rather in Dallas.

The Triple Jewels are also represented by images of Buddhas, sutras and monks and nuns. They are to remind us of the need to return and rely on the Triple

Jewels of our self-nature. When we see images of the Buddha, they remind us to be awakened and not deluded when interacting with people, matters and objects. Without this daily reminder we will remain confused and wrapped up in worldly affairs.

The sutras are to be recited daily but not for the benefit of the Buddha. We recite them as another reminder of how to cultivate our mind and how to properly interact with people, matters and objects. For example, our daily conduct is an expression of the Infinite Life Sutra when we emulate the qualities found within it.

The image of a monk or nun, whether or not he or she has abided by the precepts, reminds us to keep our six senses from becoming polluted. We need to understand that we do not take refuge in individuals who pass on to us the meaning and the cultivation guidelines of the Triple Jewels of awakening, proper thoughts and viewpoints, and purity.

Although there is an uncountable number of methods, their objectives are the same. As is often said, "all roads lead to Rome" and "all methods are the same". Pure Land practitioners should never criticize or slander Zen, Tibetan or any other schools. Why? Because their objectives are the same as ours, they simply follow different methods. This is similar to

our taking a bus while others chose to walk. We cannot say that they are wrong when all roads lead to the same destination. They have the freedom to choose their way. When I was in Huntsville, Alabama, a student asked me, "I am confused by so many methods. Which one do you think I should choose?" At the time, there happened to be a ball on the ground. I pointed to the ball and said, "Look at this ball. The surface has points countless as the number of methods. The teachings require you to find the center of the ball. You can reach the center from any point on the surface as long as you follow a straight line. You need not find a second or a third point. As an old saying goes, "Follow the road and you will get home. There is no need to circle around". He then understood that Buddhism pursues the true mind. Once we attain enlightenment, we attain everything. Therefore, no matter which method we choose, the key to success is concentration on one method. So long as we adhere to our chosen method, we will achieve deep concentration, attain wisdom and uncover the self-nature of Great Perfection.

From all of this, we can see how important the Triple Jewels are to us. Monks and nuns are the treasure of the sangha. We need to respect all of

them. We can learn from the good ones, as well as from those who do not follow the rules and guidelines. We emulate the former and use the latter to serve as negative examples.

If we fail to understand that taking refuge in the Triple Jewels does not mean following a certain person, then there will be the most serious of consequences, as we will fall into Avici Hell. Why? Throughout the universe, there is only one sangha, an integral body. The sangha in our present world is just a part of this whole. If we take refuge in and follow only one individual monk or nun, and regard that person as our only teacher and refuse to respect others. By doing so, we will be "Splitting and sowing discord among the group" the fifth of the Five Deadly Offenses of murdering our father, murdering our mother, causing a Buddha to bleed, killing a Bodhisattva or an Arhat and disrupting the unity among the Sangha. Therefore, it would be even worse to choose only a certain monk or nun for refuge than not to take refuge at all.

Furthermore, we only need to take refuge once. It does not accomplish anything to take refuge from one person this time and then from another the next time. We may think that we can get much more protection if we follow many monks and nuns. How-

ever, as the saying goes, "A clay idol crossing a river cannot even protect himself". Nobody can protect us. Only when we take Refuge in the Triple Jewels of our self-nature, can we protect ourselves. Some of those here today, may have gone through a Taking Refuge Ceremony. If now, those who have done so, have a clearer understanding then they can properly take refuge in the Triple Jewels by following the principles of awakening, proper thoughts and viewpoints, and purity.

The sixth principle of the Three Conditions is abiding by the precepts, laws and customs. Of all the precepts the most important are the basic Five Precepts. My late teacher, Living Buddha Master Zhang-Jia once said, "The Three Refuges and the Five Precepts are so essential that all Buddhist cultivators need to abide by them every moment". Then he explained further, "It is like a train ticket for you to get from northern Taiwan to southern Taiwan. From the moment you board the train until you reach your destination, you must hold on to that ticket. You must not lose it, because you have to show it when you depart. Taking Refuge in the Triple Jewels and the first Five Precepts are as important to you as that train ticket". He further explained that if we part from the Triple Jewels and the precepts, we will lose the

teachings and will no longer be a student of the Buddha.

The Five Precepts are no killing, stealing, committing sexual misconduct, lying and taking intoxicants. The first four offenses are physical transgressions of the self-nature. Whether or not we have taken the precepts, it is wrong to commit these acts. But for one, who has formally taken the Five Precepts, this will be considered as committing a double violation.

However, drinking alcohol and taking intoxicants is different. A person who has not taken the precepts is not guilty when drinking, however, a person who has taken the precepts and then drinks will have broken this precept. The purpose of refraining from intoxicants is to prevent us from committing the first four transgressions while under the influence. Therefore, intoxicants in themselves are not wrong. This is an example of why we need to understand the purpose of the Buddha's precept setting, its function and benefit.

When deciding whether to formally take the Five Precepts, the essence of all the precepts, we need to ask the Dharma Master to explain to us exactly what they mean. Only then we will know if and how to abide by them. Merely reading a book of the precepts does not necessarily ensure our commit-

ment to keeping them.

Some people have complained that there are too many precepts and that it is too easy to violate them. Thus, they abandon abiding by the precepts. This is why most people prefer reading or listening to talks about the sutras while avoiding those on precepts. We need to remember that precepts guide us in our behavior and are the proper conduct of all Buddhas. If there were no precepts, there would be no Buddhism. If there were no courtesies, there would be no Confucianism. Merely reciting the sutras without practicing the teachings within them will result in our not receiving any of their benefits. True learning lies in practice and the precepts represent the practice of Buddhism. Thus, abiding by the Five Precepts becomes the standard for our daily lives and the guidelines for us to attain proper enlightenment.

When the Buddha was in our world, he was joyful and open-minded, whether taking part in daily life or teaching. And it was this joy and energy that attracted people and helped them to accept Buddhism. It is not meant to bind us, but to benefit all beings by bringing them joy and happiness. The formation of the precepts was to show us the right path to attain a happy and fulfilling life.

A good illustration is my late teacher, Mr. Bing-Nan Lee, who lived a simple and frugal yet happy life. For decades, he only ate one meal a day. But, whenever he was invited out for dinner, he accepted. On several occasions, he invited me to accompany him. Since I had been practicing the precept of not eating dinner for years, I felt very uncomfortable when being invited. Mr. Lee simply said to me, "Come with me! Come with me!" Later he spoke to me, "With this attachment, you will not be able to help people. Why? Because if you intend to help them, you must make them happy. Eating this dinner is not violating the precepts but rather it is lifting them. They invited you with good intentions. If you reject their invitations, they will look upon you as being closed to reason. Then he will not only reject Buddhism, but also will also tell others that we practitioners are arrogant and look down upon others. He may also urge them to avoid Buddhists. So, you could ruin the opportunity of an untold number of people to learn of Buddhism. Furthermore, this will result in the creation of negative karma for you." Therefore, he was not violating the precepts but was instead simply lifting them for this meant making others happy, helping them to learn of Buddhism as well as according with conditions.

When we arrived at one dinner, the host apologized, "I am very sorry that I did not know that my Mr. Lee does not eat after noon". The host was obviously deeply moved that Mr. Lee had accepted his invitation. We can see from this that Buddhism is flexible. However, it would have been entirely different if Mr. Lee, or one who practices this precept, wanted to eat something in the evening.

Many years ago when I was young, a friend told me a story about himself. It occurred during the Chinese War of Resistance against the Japanese invasion. After the fall of Nanjing, some Japanese soldiers chased the individual and two of his friends. The three fled to a temple and were saved by an old monk who shaved their heads, gave them monks clothing to put on and told them to blend into the large assembly of monks. When the Japanese soldiers arrived at the temple, they were unable to find the three and soon left. Thus, they were saved.

When the war was over, the friends returned to Nanjing wishing to repay their debt of gratitude. They invited the old monk to a lavish banquet. He arrived to find the table laden with chicken, duck, pork and fish. All of a sudden, they remembered that the monk was a vegetarian! They were extremely upset over their mistake and did not know

what to do. But the monk acted like there was nothing unusual and picking up his chopsticks invited everyone to sit down. The three friends were greatly moved.

Did the old monk break the precepts? No! His behavior followed what is said in the sutras, "Compassion and kindness are the basis of Buddhism and skillful means are the method". He had used the first of the Four Beneficial Methods, making others happy. The old monk was moved by their gesture and did not blame them for their honest mistake. He had used the same method that the Bodhisattvas use to help people through the dharma doors. If the monk had been angry, he could have easily ruined their interest in Buddhism. But he was wise enough to use the opportunity to help guide three people. Therefore, we again see that Mahayana Buddhism is highly flexible, as it accords with the existing circumstances.

Let's look at strictly abiding by the precepts. The Five Precepts are the heart, the essence of all the precepts. Expanding further, we follow all the precepts as set forth by Buddha Shakyamuni, as well as the social norms, customs, rules and laws in every country. When in China we follow Chinese customs, rules and laws. When in the United States we do the

same. In other words, precepts are rules we need to follow in our daily lives. The modern conveniences of transportation and communication have greatly increased opportunities for travel to different countries and regions of the world. We need to follow the advice of "When in Rome do as the Romans do". This is called strictly abiding by the precepts.

Many of the precepts taught by Buddha Shakyamuni were appropriate for that time but are no longer suitable today. Why? Our manner of living, dressing and eating is totally different from those of India several thousand years ago. For example, of the two hundred fifty precepts for monks, ten rules on the etiquette of dressing are totally unsuitable for today as ancient Indians dressed differently than we do. Eating is another area that has changed considerably. Therefore, when we recite and study the texts on the precepts today, we are learning "the spirit of the law and not just the letter".

Likewise, when we practice adhering to the precepts, the most important point is to follow their fundamental spirit, "Do nothing that is bad: do everything that is good". "To do nothing that is bad" is directed toward us. This is a Theravada precept to develop self-discipline and is to be followed conscientiously. It is what the Chinese call "Attending to

one's own moral wellbeing even while alone". When we practice self-discipline, we need to remain true to the precepts, even when we are alone. "To do all that is virtuous" is for the benefit of all beings. This is a Bodhisattva precept in teaching us how to interact with others. Precepts are the criteria for distinguishing between good and bad.

Because of the differences in the political system, philosophy and culture, the precepts needed to be modified when Buddhism was introduced into China. The rules established by Master Bai-Zhang, in the Tang Dynasty, were the modified versions adapted for China at that time, however, the essence remained unchanged. This is similar to a state revising the law from time to time. As new situations arise, it becomes necessary to amend some articles, but the principle remains the same. In China, way places in every province and regions have their own version of the precepts. They need to mesh with the local conditions for people to follow them. This is simply a modification. If this is not done, then Buddhism will not survive. Only through this updating and modification will it be vital and constantly renewed, allowing it to be accepted and practiced around the world.

The Buddha told us that if we can abide by the

precepts and laws, we will have a tranquil body and mind, which will allow us to be free from worries and fear. Deep concentration arises from tranquility. Therefore, the precepts are essential to self-cultivation. If we break the law or the precepts, then our conscience will be plagued by guilt even if no punishment is meted out. Moreover, even if we avoid worldly retributions, there is no way to avoid our karmic retribution. When our body and mind are disturbed, we cannot concentrate on our practice. To practice successfully, we need to be tranquil. It is said, "Precepts or self-discipline lead to deep concentration, from which wisdom arises". In summary, the Second Condition, including abiding by the precepts, is a Theravada act of merit and the basis for practice.

The seventh principle of behaving in a dignified and proper manner means we act appropriately for the circumstances we are in. We act from the heart of sincerity and respect for all beings, animate and inanimate, to accord with social etiquette.

The Third Condition: The Good Fortune Required to be a Bodhisattva

The Third Condition is built upon the basis of the

Second Condition and includes:

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.

The eighth principle is generating the Bodhi mind. Chinese Buddhists primarily practice Mahayana Buddhism and wish to develop the Bodhi mind, the awakened mind that is genuinely free from delusions. It is the awakened mind that realizes this world is full of misery and suffering. It is the compassionate and sincere mind, with every thought to attain realization for self and others. The Buddha told us that suffering exists throughout the six realms. Not only is the human life one of suffering, but heavenly life as well. The sufferings of the human realm are so numerous that it would take hours to describe them. Simply said, they are the Eight Sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, death, hardships, the inability to have what we want, being separated from our loved ones and being in the presence of those we dislike or even hate,

A person who has been born into the Form

Heaven is one who has accomplished deep concentration as well as having severed the five desires for wealth, lust, food or drink, fame and sleep. In this realm there is no suffering arising from external circumstances such as famine, storm, sickness, etc., but the beings here still suffer the inevitably consequences of time, deterioration or decay of the body and finally the realization that they will not remain in this heaven permanently. With a physical body, we are mortal; we are born, we become old, we fall ill, we die. With material form, there is impermanence; there is creation, existence, annihilation and void.

A higher level is the Formless Heaven. Here, there is no sensuality, no form of male or female and no material form. The inhabitants have no sufferings arising from external circumstances or deterioration. However, here exists the suffering of the realization that nothing is eternal, nothing lasts forever, that the beings here are not in Nirvana. For example, one is not eternal, or able to remain in the Formless Heaven forever. Therefore, the only way to be free and happy is to transcend the three realms of the Desire Heaven, the Form Heaven and the Formless Heaven of pure spirit. How? By practicing according to the Buddha's teachings, for in this way we will truly generate the Bodhi Mind and be enlightened.

The Bodhi mind is fulfilled by the Four Great Vows of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas:

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

Mahayana Bodhisattvas cherish the heart to help all sentient beings. They not only know their own suffering and try to help themselves, but they also want to help their families, relatives, friends; all sentient beings. To equally wish to help all beings, this is the great Bodhi mind. The Infinite Life Sutra tells us that Bodhisattvas are the "Unrequested friends of all beings". Even if you do not seek help from them, they come to help. They voluntarily introduce Buddhism to all and this is the pure cause of a Bodhisattva.

To help all beings, we need to first know how to help ourselves. To do this we first free ourselves from worries and afflictions. It is important for us to follow

the Four Great Vows in the order listed. However, some practitioners practice the third vow of various methods before they practice the second vow, to be free from afflictions. Of the Four Great Vows, they want to achieve the latter two of learning all methods and attaining enlightenment, but not the first two of helping all beings and abandoning afflictions. Their attempts are like trying to build the third and fourth floors of a house without first building the first and second floors.

Today, there are many practitioners, but few of them have succeeded. Why? They did not understand that first they needed to vow to help all sentient beings, for this great compassion is a critical driving force for us to truly study and practice. This is the heart of great kindness and compassion. Nor did they begin with the prerequisites such as eliminating delusions, greed, attachments and ignorance, which disturb and distress the mind. There are so many beings waiting for us to help them break away from their suffering. If we have no virtue, no knowledge, no ability, how can we help others? We do not attain Buddhahood for ourselves. This is the power of great kindness and compassion.

Years ago, when I first started to study with my late teacher, Mr. Lee, he placed three restrictions on

me:

1. I was to follow only his lecturing or teaching,
2. I was to read no books or reference materials without his permission and
3. As everything I had previously learned was not recognized, I was to restart as a beginner.

The first blocked my ears, the second covered my eyes and the third cleared my mind. The requirements seemed so imperious and unreasonable. "What an arrogant and autocratic man he is", I thought. Yet I still accepted his restrictions and learned from him. I did not realize that these restrictions were precepts to help me to cut off my afflictions. My mind became purer with much less wandering thoughts after following his restrictions for just six months. His method helped me to practice the second great vow to end all afflictions.

I became very grateful to him. Although he had only asked me to follow his restrictions for five years, I volunteered to extend my study with him for another five. After ten years as his student and abiding by his rules, I had established a solid foundation in Buddhism. Thus, he lifted the ban and encouraged me to broaden my field of study. In other words, I could listen to any teacher, even ones with deviated

thoughts. I could read any books. Why? He told me that all knowledge would be beneficial rather than harmful to me because I could distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong. I would not be misled by anyone. He likened it to a child who was innocent and young, needing to have the guidance and protection of parents before having the ability to judge and to make decisions.

Good teachers are truly compassionate and kind. They are patient in teaching and dedicated to their duty. They try to protect their students from contamination of the mind. It is crucial for us to be close to a good teacher; however, being close does not mean being next to the teacher but rather to listen to and follow their teachings. It is usually very hard to find one. We only meet the right teacher after many lifetimes. Some people have said to me that I was most fortunate to have met good teachers, but where could they find one? This teacher is to be encountered rather than sought and the chances for this are rare indeed. It is a matter of affinity and the right conditions maturing. We need to nurture the good root and opportunities. If we are unable to meet these rare teachers, then we can learn from ancient sages.

Mr. Lee modestly told me that he only had the

ability to teach me for five years. He encouraged me to continue my studies by learning from his teacher, the late Venerable Master Yin-Guang. He advised me not to emulate people who were famous Buddhist scholars, who were knowledgeable in Buddhist studies, but who had not attained achievement in cultivation. Master Yin-Guang was currently the best teacher. When we cannot find the true knowledge of goodness in current teachers, we can turn to ancient sages. There have been many people who have succeeded with this method.

The first person in China to take an ancient master as his teacher was Mencius. He learned from Confucius, who had left his writings for later generations to learn from. Mencius only read Confucius' books and followed his teachings exclusively. He is acknowledged as a great sage, second only to Confucius. After Mencius, there were many others who succeeded in their academic pursuits using the same method. Another example is Master Ou-Yi of the Ming Dynasty, who was a patriarch of the Pure Land School.

As for finding a good teacher today, do not follow me, I am not eligible to be a teacher. Mr. Lee once advised me to learn from Master Yin-Guang. I recommend that you should select the best teacher,

Buddha Amitabha and the Infinite Life Sutra for your practice. When we succeed in our practice, we will attain Buddhahood. The most important thing in Buddhism is to concentrate on and delve deeply into one method. Then we will surely reach deep concentration and attain wisdom. In times past, people devoted to practice normally spent five years for this stage of learning and cultivation. During these five years, they would specialize in a certain method. Afterwards, they were allowed to study various sutras. At that point, I believe their understanding would be greatly improved and they will naturally understand the meanings in sutras. If we still have wandering and discriminatory thoughts, and have not yet awakened our wisdom, then even if we were to study for three hundreds years, we would still not understand the meanings of the sutras and their commentaries.

Mr. Lee had set three restrictions for me, which I thought were his alone. In 1989, when I was lecturing in Singapore, Master Yan Pei invited me to give a lecture to a group of practitioners. Seeing that there were many young people, I told them of my past experiences and advised them to solely follow Master Yan Pei. I recommended that they, "Follow one teacher and one method, you will surely succeed".

After the lecture, Master Yan Pei invited me to have tea with him. He told me that when he was a young monk, his teacher had set the same three restrictions on him. Then I realized that the three restrictions were not the invention of one individual, rather they were the prerequisites that past masters set for their students.

Only then did I understand what "Inheritance of the tradition from the master" meant. When the teacher thinks that we are good students, he will require us to follow the three restrictions. He will first cover our eyes and block our ears so that no worries will intrude. When we truly have abandoned all attachments and gained wisdom, we will be allowed to study other methods. Therefore, extensive learning is conducted in the second stage rather than at the beginning.

Difficulties can arise if we engage in extensive learning at the very beginning. It is similar to hearing instructions from one master and beginning to follow him. Then we hear instructions from a second master and feel as if we were facing two paths leading in different directions. With three masters, we would be caught at a three-way junction and with four, we are stuck at a crossroads not knowing which way to go. Therefore, it is important to follow only one master at

one time. Reading of ancient sages, monks and laypeople, we see that some followed their teacher for twenty to thirty years until they achieved some awakening. Only then did they begin to study extensively with other teachers.

Buddhist education is different from modern education in terms of concepts and methods. For instance, in a university, we must be very careful and take our time choosing our major. Buddhism however, is different. Here we are expected to awaken to perfect, complete wisdom first and then in the future we will become knowledgeable in all other departments of the university. Where do we start? From the intensive study of a certain method, just as is said in "Awakening in one sutra means awakening in all sutras". What does awakening mean? Awakened means to have attained wisdom.

Modern education is similar to building a pyramid. We read extensively and then narrow the scope of learning to specialize in one subject. This is a way of progressing from extensive to intensive learning. But, no matter how tall the pyramid or how large its base, the pyramid has its zenith. Buddhism is different. It is like a tree with roots, trunk, branches, leaves and finally fruits. It is an infinite process, starting from one point, the root, and then developing

into the Great Perfection of the Self-nature. The result is that we understand everything. Worldly knowledge has its limitations after which there is no more to learn. Buddhism, however, is boundless. The wisdom of Buddhism is beyond the comprehension of average people. Buddhism may seem ordinary at the beginning, but the achievements we make later are inconceivable. On the contrary, worldly studies initially appear extensive and comprehensive but in the end, they provide no lasting accomplishment.

By following the Four Great Vows, we will eventually uncover our original self-nature. In the Flower Adornment Sutra, Sudhana served as a role model for our cultivation. He not only taught us the principles and methods but also how to apply them in our daily lives. Manjushri Bodhisattva, Sudhana's first teacher, instructed him to follow the aforementioned three restrictions and to sever all afflictions, to accomplish self-discipline, deep concentration and wisdom. After Sudhana had attained original wisdom, Manjushri Bodhisattva then allowed him to travel extensively and to learn other methods by visiting fifty-three spiritual guides who represented different occupations and levels in society.

His last visit was with Universal Worthy Bodhisattva who taught him the Ten Great Vows, as well as how

to chant "Amitabha" and to be born into the Western Pure Land, where upon meeting Buddha Amitabha, he attained perfect complete enlightenment. Without being born into the Pure Land and meeting Buddha Amitabha, we will only fulfill the second and third vows of severing all afflictions and mastering all methods but will find it difficult to attain Buddhahood.

In the Flower Adornment Sutra both Mangers and Universal Worthy Bodhisattvas had reached the level of equal enlightenment and vowed to be born into the Pure Land. I was surprisingly pleased to discover this when I gave talks on the Flower Adornment Sutra. I wondered why enlightened Bodhisattvas in the Flower Adornment World would want to be born into the Western Pure Land, considering how wonderful their own world was, it seemed unnecessary for them to do so. After thinking about it, I realized that they had vowed to go there to be able to attain Buddhahood in a short time. If not for this, there would be no reason to go to the Pure Land of Buddha Amitabha.

Suddenly, I realized that if we want to attain the perfect complete enlightenment, we need to go to the Western Pure Land. Only by understanding the "Chapter of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's Conduct

and Vows" will we know the proper way to study and practice Mahayana Buddhism. And when we truly understand, have awakened and have generated the Bodhi mind, we will finally be free from delusions and attachments.

The ninth principle of the Three Conditions is to deeply believe in the Law of Cause and Effect. Earlier in my practice, I was puzzled by this phrase in the Visualization Sutra. Why? It seemed to imply that a Bodhisattva had no understanding of the Law of Cause and Effect. If we know that good causes will result in good effects and that bad causes will result in bad effects, how could it be that a Bodhisattva was not aware of this? But the sutra urges Bodhisattvas to believe in cause and effect. I could not understand it.

Then I read the Flower Adornment Sutra and upon carefully reading the chapter about the Ten Grounds, I suddenly saw the light. It said that, "from the beginning to the end, the Ten Ground Bodhisattvas have always practiced the mindfulness of the Buddha". I then realized that the Bodhisattvas, from the first to the tenth ground and the level of equal enlightenment, all practiced the Buddha Name Chanting method. And I also came to understand that "Chanting the Buddha's name is the cause and

attaining Buddhahood is the effect". Many Bodhisattvas were not aware of this, which is why Buddha Shakyamuni explained it in this sutra. It was their firm belief in the above statement that led Manjushri Bodhisattva, Universal Worthy Bodhisattva and Sudhana to vow to be born into the Pure Land. It was after I had studied and lectured on the Flower Adornment Sutra that I came to understand this statement. Thus, it really is difficult to acquire this understanding.

The tenth principle of the Three Conditions is reciting and upholding Mahayana sutras, which help us to understand the true reality of life and the universe. With this understanding, we will know the proper way to think and behave as well as the appropriate method to use. Only when we truly accord with the teachings of the sutra, will we benefit. As practitioners, the least we need to do is to participate in the daily morning and evening sessions. The purpose of the morning session is to start a new day by reminding ourselves to base our thought and behavior on the Buddha's teachings. The purpose of the evening session is to reflect on whether we have followed the instructions. If not, then we need to earnestly regret and vow to correct our mistakes.

For the sessions, Pure Land Practitioners used to

recite the Amitabha Sutra, chant the Rebirth Mantra three times and then follow by chanting "Amitabha". The more times they recited "Amitabha", the better the result. This practice of single-mindedness was the same for morning and evening. The Amitabha Sutra appears simple but is actually extremely profound. To recite and benefit from it, we need a pure and quiet heart. The second time I lectured on the commentary of the Amitabha Sutra, it took over three hundred sessions, which is an indication of its level of complexity.

I now recommend the Infinite Life Sutra, which is easier to understand both in language and meaning. Since many people lead such busy lives, I suggest reciting Chapter Six for the morning session, which is comprised of the Forty-eight vows of Buddha Amitabha. It is the core of Pure Land Buddhism because true cultivators need to have the same compassion and vows as those of Buddha Amitabha. For the evening session, I recommend reading chapters thirty-two to thirty-seven, in which the Buddha teaches us how to end all wrongdoings, practice good conduct and how to interact with objects, matters and people in our daily living. If we can follow at least these chapters then we abide by the precepts.

If we can follow the above practices, be mindful of Buddha Amitabha and abide by the teachings in these six chapters, we would have the same mind, vows, understanding and practice of Buddha Amitabha then we are Buddha Amitabha. But if we chant or read indifferently without applying the principles, then all the efforts we put forth will be pointless. The combination of morning and evening sessions was designed in ancient times and proved to be useful, for the people of that time had better understanding of what they were reciting. These sessions reminded people to behave in a proper manner and thus helped them to detect their faults. Today, however, people simply recite absentmindedly, like small children who sing a song with the right words to the right tune, but without understanding the meaning. Only when we become aware of the purpose and method of chanting the sutra can we actually achieve any results.

My late teacher, Mr. Lee, always told his students that when they listened to lectures, they needed to concentrate on understanding the principles in the sutra and not the words themselves. These principles are the laws governing the Buddha's teachings as well as worldly teachings. One, who thoroughly understands the principles of one sutra, can then use

them to master all sutras. In other words, the student must conscientiously follow the methods taught by the teacher and do so wholeheartedly without being distracted by anything new and different.

To develop the Paramita of Patience, we need to persevere in our cultivation. People may recommend other methods or sutras as a better choice. Do not listen to them; do not pay attention to them until we have attained wisdom. Delve deeply into just one method. This is the key to success in our study and cultivation.

The eleventh principle of the Three Conditions is encouraging others to advance on the path to enlightenment. To do this, we extensively introduce Buddhism to those who are willing to learn. While the first ten principles of the Three Conditions are for self-benefit and cultivation, the eleventh is to encourage and help others to understand and practice Buddhism. To help others is the act of a Bodhisattva.

By fulfilling all the principles in the Three Conditions, from practicing filial piety for parents to encouraging others on the path to enlightenment, we will become the "good man and woman" of the Mahayana sutras. The Earth Treasure Sutra tells us that if we chant the name, make offerings to Earth Treasure Bodhisattva and accord with the teachings,

then we can be born into the thirty-third Heaven one hundred times, without falling into the three bad realms.

In our world, we are considered a good man or woman after fulfilling the First Condition. The criteria in the Theravada teachings require us to meet the First and Second Conditions. However, in the Mahayana teachings, we are required to meet all three conditions. Therefore, when reading sutras, we need to ask ourselves whether or not we are qualified to be "good men or women". How much have I achieved? And does my conduct conform to the standards set forth in the Mahayana teachings?

The Six Principles of Harmony

The Three Conditions are the basis for individual cultivation whereas the Six Principles of Harmony are the basis for group cultivation. The sangha is a group of four or more people who properly practice the Buddha's teachings together, especially the Six Principles of Harmony. They are:

1. Sharing the same viewpoints or goals,
2. Abiding by the same precepts,
3. Living and practicing together harmoniously,
4. Not quarrelling,

5. Experiencing the inner peace and happiness from practicing together harmoniously and
6. Sharing benefits harmoniously.

Sharing the Same Viewpoints or Goals.

This means mutual understanding or agreement. A group needs to share the same viewpoints of the principles and methods for study and practice. This is the basis for harmonious group cultivation.

If a society is to remain stable, its members need to live in harmony. Only harmony can draw us together in terms of opinions, ideas and our way of life. In other words, being harmonious can minimize the differences in human relations and improve equality. After that, peace and then finally, happiness can be achieved. To obtain happiness we must have a peaceful heart and body. Both Buddhist and worldly teachings emphasize the importance of harmony and respect.

A few years ago I went to Beijing and visited the Forbidden City, where there are three main palaces, the names of which all contain the word harmony. This shows that the early emperors of the Ching Dynasty, the last dynasty, tried to rule the country with

harmony. However, the disharmony, which plagued the imperial family at the beginning of this century, ended the dynasty. Therefore, harmony is crucial for lasting peace and happiness.

Buddha Shakyamuni provided innumerable methods to practice but he did not intend that we try them all. We need to find the one most appropriate for us and then remember that the key lies in exclusive pursuit. In ancient times, the Pure Land School adopted three sutras and one sastra, now we emphasize five sutras and one sastra. As stated in an ancient Chinese textbook, "Of all the teaching principles, exclusive pursuit is the most important". Suppose some people like the Infinite Life Sutra while others prefer the Amitabha Sutra. Can these two groups of people merge into one? They may merge, but they cannot practice harmoniously together, for when one half begins to recite the Infinite Life Sutra, the other half will want to recite the Amitabha Sutra. In order to create group unity, it will be necessary to set up two separate way places.

This explains why there are so many different way places even though we are all Pure Land practitioners. The same principle applies to choosing sutras with multiple commentaries. Which one will we use? This will result in a further setting up of way places.

The same process can even occur when deciding which form of chanting to follow. Some prefer to chant slowly "Namo Amituofo" while others prefer a very fast "Amituofo, Amituofo, Amituofo". It would be very difficult for the two groups to practice harmoniously together. The people in ancient way places were able to achieve because everyone shared the same viewpoints and goals and practiced the same method without intermingling. Their very atmosphere was conducive to magnificence and peace. Thus, all those who entered naturally gave rise to respect.

Unfortunately, a common situation in modern way places is that the teachings of various schools are intermingled. Contradictions and conflicts are unavoidable, and it will be difficult for practitioners to focus, much less to succeed. So, it becomes evident that "Sharing the same viewpoints or goals" is crucial in a way place.

If the people in a group share similar ideas and viewpoints as well as the same interests and objectives, they can remain in harmony and thus form a sangha. However, they may as well form a separate sangha if differences arise. Otherwise, there would be conflicts and no one would succeed. By providing an infinite number of methods for cultivation, the

Buddha meant to ensure that people of different viewpoints and interests would all be able to succeed in their cultivation. Thus, it is said that all paths lead to the same goal, as all methods are equal. This demonstrates the Buddha's great, compassionate heart, as he never forces anyone to practice one particular method.

As we have seen from the example in the Visualization Sutra. Madame Vaidehi, being overwhelmed by the suffering in this world, asked Buddha Shakyamuni to tell her of a place where suffering did not exist. Instead of directing her to the Western Pure Land, he displayed all the Buddhalands for her so that she could choose one for herself. This is unlike most of us who want others to accept our opinions; "I have been practicing this method. It's great. Come and try it." When others have different ideas and viewpoints, this will often disrupt the harmony of the group and is the very thing we should guard against. The best way to introduce Buddhism is to provide a general introduction to the Mahayana teachings and practices and let others chose whichever method they prefer.

Those who prefer Buddha Name Chanting can practice together; those who prefer meditation can practice together. In this way, everybody has a

place to go for cultivation and there is no need to pressure anyone into using one particular method. All methods are equal and were taught to meet our different needs, abilities and levels of understanding. Thus, each school should respect and praise the other. This is the true practice of the first harmony.

Abiding by the Same Precepts

When we live and practice together, we need to have rules and regulations for without them there will be disorder. Needless to say, the rules need to include the five fundamental precepts set by the Buddha. Rules vary for lay sanghas and those at way places. The former conforms to the five fundamental precepts, the latter to the monk or nun precepts. In addition, common rules, regulations and local laws and customs are also to be observed. These all comprise the Permanent Resident Agreement of a way place. One or two members can be designated to draft the rules, which are then presented to the group for discussion and voting. Each individual living in the way place must abide by the agreement once it is set up. If every member respects and abides by the agreement, there will be no discord within the group, because all are have equal status

and no special privileges are granted to anyone. Thus, the sangha is truly democratic and law abiding.

Living and Practicing Together Harmoniously

The purpose of establishing a way place is to help everyone achieve in group practice. It is definitely not to help individuals escape their worldly responsibilities. It is a serious mistake to think this way, especially in the light of all the offerings way places receive from followers and the reality that every offering will have to be repaid, if not in this lifetime then in a future lifetime. The manner of living together does not mean that each person has his or her own room. If luxurious and comfortable facilities are available, it will be very difficult to achieve. Why? The Earth Treasure Sutra tells us that, "Every single movement or stirring of thoughts on the part of the living beings is karma and an offense". For uncountable eons we have been deluded and confused and have thus committed infinite wrongdoings. Consequently, we have developed and accumulated infinite bad habits. When with others, we usually try to be civilized and behave ourselves. But, when alone, we tend to indulge ourselves in doing whatever we feel comfortable with and easily forget

proper conduct.

To counter this, members of the group share sleeping quarters. These quarters in a traditional way place are comprised of one large bed with a space for each person. Quilts are neatly folded as in an army barracks. Life in a way place was even more rigorous than that of the army and the monks and nuns were even more disciplined than the soldiers are. Only by living in such a disciplined way place, are we able to mold our temperament and reform ourselves through the Three Learnings of self-discipline, deep concentration and wisdom. This is true cultivation.

However, there are exceptions in way places. For example, the managing monk and the executive deputy chief, due to their responsibilities, have their own rooms, which is usually very small, in order for them to plan and take care of daily tasks without disturbing others. Monks and nuns, who are aged or ill, also have their own rooms. To accomplish our cultivation, this shared living is necessary, even in today's affluent society.

Not Quarrelling

All the members who live together need to do so

without quarrelling. In this way, they can best concentrate their efforts on cultivation. When people are together, the most frequent act is that of speech, so speech karma is the easiest to commit. We have a proverb, "Illness enters by the mouth; trouble exits from the mouth". Another is "More speech, more trouble". One, who eats too much, easily becomes sick. One, who talks too much, easily gets into trouble. Sometimes misunderstandings arise because the listener is sensitive while the speaker is careless. Both parties develop resentment and hatred, which gives rise to endless retaliation in the future. This is why ancient sages advised us to "Talk less and chant the Buddha's name more". The less we speak, the better it is for the less trouble we will be in. Ideally, we would only speak when it was necessary.

When I was in Los Angeles, a friend told me about the three-day Zen retreat his high-school son had attended. Once inside, no one was allowed to talk. The daily practice was sitting meditation, from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Nothing else was done. Keeping silent for three days in a way place like this will help us to calm down and relax. The boy was so impressed that he wanted to go back for the longer winter session. The distinctive feature of such a way place is the harmony of si-

lence and no quarrelling.

So, at a strict way place where chatting or other irrelevant talk is forbidden, there is virtually no opportunity for quarrelling. Almost exclusively, all we will find is the silent or voiced continuous chanting of "Amituofo" in the chanting hall. In a Tibetan way place, the chanting of mantras is ceaseless. For instance, during my early stage of Buddhist study, I was under the guidance of Living Buddha Master Zhang-Jia for three years. Through my observation, he never stopped silently chanting a mantra while moving his lips even when he was with visitors. He only paused to talk and as soon as he was finished, would resume his silent chanting.

This silent chanting while moving our lips is a form of practice called, "Diamond Holding". Master Zhang-Jia was one of the sincerest practitioners I have ever met. His mind was pure without any attachments or wandering thoughts. His teaching method was unique. He never spoke a word until he found the listener attentive and concentrated. He then spoke only a few words while looking directly into your eyes. Each of his words bore heavy weight, which his listener would never forget and adhere to for the rest of his or her life. The goal of our practice is to eradicate all afflictions and attain the Buddha

Name Chanting Samadhi. If we do not practice this method, it will be very difficult for us to achieve this goal.

Experiencing the Inner Peace and Happiness
from Practicing Together Harmoniously

This is to savor the Dharma joy. Whichever practice method we choose, the basic achievement we have in our practice is happiness. If we feel unhappy after beginning our practice, we have definitely encountered a serious problem. But the problem does not lie with the Buddha's teachings. We may have done something that goes against the principles of these teachings or we may have chosen the wrong method. Otherwise, the results would be evident; awakening from confusion and obsession, leaving sufferings behind and obtaining happiness.

With each passing year, we would have fewer worries while enjoying greater happiness and freedom. This is the evidence of success in our practice. If we are not achieving this, then we need to examine ourselves for the cause of our lack of success. If we can correct our mistakes, find the root of our afflictions and sever them, we can then attain the benefits of our practice.

Practicing Buddhism is to experience life and to train our minds. Buddhist cultivation arises from our heart as we participate in daily life. What kind of heart do we cultivate? One of purity. When we have proper viewpoints and understanding and truly dedicate ourselves to Buddhism, regardless of who we are or what our circumstances are, whether good or bad, favorable or unfavorable, we will be able to reduce karmic debts and to plant the seeds of good fortune, wisdom and happiness. How then can we be unhappy? A feeling of joy naturally arises from our heart, as we savor the Dharma Joy. If we practice together harmoniously, everybody will attain this Dharma joy, everybody will attain achievement.

Sharing Benefits Equally

In ancient times, ordained people led a simple life with one meal a day. They received food donated by people in the village, rested under the trees at night and cultivated constantly. So, the way place was more like a school to educate the local community on Buddhism. Learned and far-sighted people built them with the financial support from those who were wealthy and held high status in the

community. Then well-known and respected monks were invited to cultivate and conduct the teachings.

Way places were Buddhist educational institutions where everyone shared equally. If this principle were to be applied to society there would be no psychological imbalance and hence no social disturbances. At way places, none of the Six Harmonies can be neglected or else there will not be a true Sangha. As the Chinese say, "harmony in the family is the basis for any undertaking". Similarly, if a country is united, it will not be easy for another power to dominate it, because the power of unity is inconceivable. Consequently, if a family, company, social group or a country can practice three of the six harmonies of sharing the same viewpoints or goals, observing the same precepts, and sharing benefits equally, they will become prosperous.

We find an example in the business world where Japanese business developed dramatically after World War II. It has only been half a century, but these businesses were among the most successful in the world. Why? They have practiced these three harmonies. By sharing the same viewpoints and goals, the sangha can reach common understanding. By abiding by the same precepts, all abide by the laws. By sharing all benefits equally, everyone is

assured that there will be fairness in all things.

The importance of harmony also holds for the family. As the Chinese say, "Harmony in the family is the basis for any undertaking". One day, a student of mine asked for my opinion about the kind of person he should marry. I told him, "You should try to find someone who has the same viewpoints and goals that you do. Then you will help each other and enjoy a happy family life. You cannot just emphasize love for love is volatile and unreliable. It may fade after the two of you get married at which point everything can change". Therefore, a happy family life is built upon the basis of the Six Harmonies. If we do not understand this, it will be difficult for us to have a happy and enjoyable family.

The Three Learnings

We know that the very nature of Buddhism is education. It encompasses a large number of subjects, which cover the perfect knowledge of life and the universe. The textbooks for these subjects are sutras. However, not all of the sutras in India were brought to China. Because of the difficulties in the long journey between China and India in ancient times, both the Indian monks who visited China and

the Chinese monks who returned after visiting India, had to limit the number of books they carried. They selected the most important ones and had to leave the others behind. So, all the books that were introduced into China were considered the essence of Buddhism.

However, after their introduction, not all of the books could be translated. Further screening had to be done and only the best and the most essential were selected for the difficult translation process. The project was financed by the central government. Experts, who were monks and laypeople from all over China as well as from foreign countries, were invited to participate in the mammoth translation effort. According to historical records, Master Kumarajiva's translation institute had over four hundred people while Master Xuan-Zhuang's institute had more then six hundred people.

The name of the translator that we see today at the beginning of the sutra is the chief of the institute and represents all the translators in the group. The Chinese sutras that we have today are fairly complete. However, the Indian Sanskrit versions have been largely lost with few remaining. After the Chinese sutras, the second largest collection is that of Tibet. Part of this collection was translated directly

from the Sanskrit and the rest came from the Chinese versions.

Princess Wen-Cheng of the Tang Dynasty brought Buddhist sutras to Tibet when she was married to the Tibetan king. This is why the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet was some six hundred years later than the introduction of the teachings to Chinese. As the Tibetan king built up belief in Buddhism, a new school from India found its way into Tibet.

An important part of the teachings are the Three Learnings of abiding by the precepts or self-discipline, deep concentration and wisdom. Accomplishment of these can relieve the suffering of this world. Buddha Shakyamuni told us how long the teachings would remain on this earth. The Dharma Perfect Age would last five hundred years. The Dharma Semblance Age would last one thousand years. The Dharma Ending Age that we are now in will last ten thousand years.

What are the sufferings of the sentient beings in our current age? The first is committing the wrongdoings of the Ten Bad Conducts. The Buddha taught us the First Learning of self-discipline to overcome these. The second suffering is the inability to remain serene and at peace. The Buddha taught us the Second Learning of deep concentration to achieve

purity of mind and tranquility. The third suffering is ignorance. The Buddha taught us the Third Learning of wisdom to overcome our current state of ignorance.

Committing wrongdoings, being confused and remaining in ignorance are three of the major problems of sentient beings in our contemporary world. The Buddha will teach when these problems afflict the sentient beings in our world. However, if the beings are not ill, there will be no need for the Buddha to teach. The Diamond Sutra says, "in the end we even have to lay aside the Buddha's teachings, let alone the worldly teachings". When beings are well, the teachings are unnecessary and introducing them might even lead to more problems. This is similar to a healthy person taking medicine every day and eventually falling ill.

Self-discipline cures our body, deep concentration cures our mind and wisdom cures our behavior. Therefore, a person who practices Buddhism is wise in thought, speech and behavior. So how could such a person be unhappy?

The Six Paramitas

Now that we understand the Three Conditions,

the Three Learnings and the Six Principles of Harmony, how do we use them in our daily lives when interacting with people, matters and objects? To answer this Buddha Shakyamuni gave us the Six Paramitas of giving, abiding by the precepts, patience, diligence, deep concentration and wisdom. If we follow these in everything we do, from brushing our teeth in the morning until going to bed at night, we will be genuinely practicing.

The Paramita of Giving

The Giving of Wealth. Generally speaking, the majority of people seek wealth as their foremost pursuit for without it, life can be very hard. After this, people pursue intelligence and wisdom, health and long life. Regardless of whether they are in the east or in the west: whether they lived either in the past or are living now, these are major pursuits of humankind. If Buddhism is supposed to fulfill our wishes, can it provide these things for us? We have heard that "in Buddhism, every sincere plea will receive a response." Then why have most people not received what they wished for? They are not aware of the true reality of life and universe or the right method to fulfill their wishes. If we understand these principles

and truths, all our wishes can be fulfilled.

The Buddha taught us that wealth, wisdom and long life are all karmic results. If we want to obtain the result, we must first nurture and establish the cause. Good causes result in good results: bad causes result in bad results or retribution. Where there is a cause, there will be a result and where there is a result, there was a cause. This is a law that never changes and the law around which all other laws in the universe revolve.

Consider someone who is very wealthy. How did this happen? It is not because the person is unusually clever or has better ideas to make money. Many other people are cleverer and have better ideas. Why are they not successful? The Buddha taught us that having wealth is the karmic result of a cause planted in former lifetimes. What was this cause? It was through the giving of wealth.

The giving of wealth results in obtaining wealth, the giving of teaching results in attaining wisdom and the giving of fearlessness results in obtaining health and long life. Therefore, if we wish to have wealth, wisdom and long and healthy lives in our future, we need to nurture and establish these causes in this lifetime. Only a small number of people obtain the results from causes they developed in their early years.

Regardless of the time frame, we must develop the cause to receive the result. This is the Law of Cause and Effect. And this law never changes.

Giving is the most important requirement for practicing the Bodhisattva way. If we could sum up all the methods in Buddhism, we would find that all methods accord with the Six Paramitas. When we condense the Six Paramitas, we find that their essence is giving. One of the types of giving is that of wealth. When most people hear this, they often think of donating money to a group, church, temple or way place. This is wrong because such thinking is too narrow in meaning and is far from the true Bodhisattva way.

Selflessly remembering the welfare of others is the giving of wealth. Thus, everybody is practicing the giving paramita daily and in this way, we are emulating Bodhisattvas. We are just not aware of it. For example, when we get up in the morning and prepare breakfast for the family, we are practicing giving and kindness as did Universal Worthy Bodhisattva. By doing so we will be happy. In this way we will have no thought of "Poor me, my family regards me as a servant. I have to wait on them every day." If we complain like this, all the good fortune we have achieved will vanish. But once we change our

complaints and problems into the Paramita of Giving, we will immediately enjoy the benefits of the joy and wisdom of the teachings.

An employee who works very hard every day to make as much money as possible or to receive a promotion is not practicing giving. However, if this employee works hard just to benefit the company and society, and not for the sake of money or a promotion, he or she is cultivating giving and will never be tired. I, myself, enjoy traveling around the world to help people to understand the Buddha's teachings, and in this way, am practicing the giving of teaching. I help others to better understand how to change their lives in the hope that they will be able to reduce their troubles, obtain joy and wisdom and thus be able to lead a better life.

In 1984, I made my third trip to Los Angeles. I went straight from the airport to the site where the speech was being held and began a talk that lasted nine hours. I delivered the talk while standing but at the end, it was the listeners who were tired, not I. The longer I spoke, the more energized I felt and the stronger my voice became. Why? Because I was so enthused about introducing the profound and subtle Buddhism to the listeners. This is the joy of teaching of Buddhism and frankly, the best nutrition. Nowa-

days, people talk a great deal about health food. But it is false nutrition. Buddhists talk of keeping a pure, quiet and happy heart. Having this heart and obtaining this joy will enable us to remain healthy and young. Worry will only make us old and sick.

In the US, some social practices are actually giving. Most people pay for medical insurance for protection against catastrophic medical bills in the event they become ill. However, we make preparations for a possible illness as we make our monthly premium payments, then we are bound to become ill. If we do not then we will have wasted our money. But if we change our way of viewing this to the thought that our money has been used to help those that are sick, then we will have practiced giving and will never become ill. Why? Because we have developed the cause of no illness. If we give to and look after aged people, we will receive good karmic results in the future. When we ourselves become aged, then others will come to take care of us.

Today, most people have car insurance. If we think that we are making payments just to help those who may encounter accidents, then we will never encounter misfortune, because we have given of wealth and compassion. So, our way of thinking makes the difference in whether we are a Bodhisat-

tva or an ordinary person. What is this difference? A Bodhisattva is awakened and always does things to benefit others, whereas ordinary people are always doing things to benefit themselves. When we do everything for others, we can get wonderful benefits, too wonderful to imagine. The kinds of giving are boundless and can be practiced any time, any day, any way.

In Buddhism, the giving of wealth consists of external and internal wealth. External wealth is comprised of worldly possessions whereas internal wealth concerns our body. For example, organ donation is an example of the internal giving of wealth as is helping others physically. If we volunteer to help others without expectation of benefit, we are again practicing the giving of internal wealth. We can practice this giving of internal wealth all the time.

We see that in the Buddhist criteria for good and bad, all deeds arising from the wish to help others are good and all deeds arising from selfishness are bad. This may all be difficult for a beginner to follow. Why should we not benefit ourselves? The reason why ordinary people cannot attain Buddhahood is due to the two attachments of self and all knowledge. By ridding ourselves of self-attachment, we attain the level of Arhat. By ridding ourselves of the

knowledge-attachment, we attain Buddhahood. If we have every thought to benefit ourselves, our self-attachment will grow daily. Even as we plant some good causes, we will only increase our attachment. The Buddha told us that if we wished to transcend the cycle of birth and death, we must rid ourselves of both self and the knowledge-attachment. Self-attachments are afflictions that hinder us from attaining purity of mind. Knowledge-attachment hinders us from uncovering our all-knowing wisdom, our true wisdom.

The Giving of Teachings. The second form of giving brings us wisdom, intelligence and skill. Generally, it falls into two categories: Buddha's teachings and worldly teachings. To enthusiastically impart all of our knowledge to others, who are interested in learning, is the giving of teachings. It is not limited to the teachings of Buddhism. It could be teaching others cooking, engineering, etc. It is the unconditional and free imparting of knowledge or skills in any field.

A schoolteacher who instructs out of the sincere desire to help others is also practicing the giving of teaching. A teacher who does so just to earn a living or prestige is not. A genuine practitioner of the giving of Dharma is very enthusiastic and is never weary

of giving. When we give for self-benefit, we will become disappointed upon failing to obtain prestige or other benefits and will thus loose our enthusiasm. On the other hand, a Bodhisattva is always compassionately working for the benefit of all sentient beings and never attaches any conditions to what is given.

In the Infinite Life Sutra, the Buddha told us that of all the kinds of giving, that of the teachings is foremost. Worldly teachings do not get to the heart of the matter. Buddhism is a perfect education, which can help us to attain the boundless wisdom, virtue and skill to enable us to be free of all worries, leave the cycle of birth and death, put an end to reincarnation and ultimately to attain Buddhahood. This giving is perfect and remarkable, and it is only found in Mahayana Buddhism. All Buddhas praise this giving. In Buddhism, the most important form of giving is that of books, audio and videotapes, CDs, as well as that of accepting other's invitations to lecture and thus, to create opportunities for them to learn the Buddha's teachings.

However, many currently circulated Buddhist materials are printed with copyright warnings. These are not the giving of Dharma but are commercial endeavors. Some Dharma masters, when requested to speak, ask how much they will be paid. These are

not true giving of the teachings. The act of a Bodhisattva is to benefit others, not self. If a person truly wanted to learn of Buddhism, a Bodhisattva would simply go to them to fulfill their wish. They would never do anything that would make it difficult for any person willing to learn, as long as the person could receive the true benefits from Buddhism

The Giving of Fearlessness. This form of giving has broad implications as it helps to remove the fears and insecurities of others. For example, if foreign forces were invading our country, we could join the army to help protect the citizens. If someone was afraid to go home alone at night, we could offer to go with him or her. Being a vegetarian is another example, because if we all followed this practice, then all living creatures would no longer regard us as a threat. Any act that helps sentient beings feel safe and secure is the giving of fearlessness. In doing so perfectly, we will definitely gain health and long life.

Emperor Qian Long of the Qing Dynasty, attained wealth, intellect, wisdom, health and long life. "Honorable as a great emperor and wealthy as one who possesses the entire world". He was truthful, clever, wise and lived a long life. He was emperor for sixty years and Supreme Emperor, Father of an Emperor, for four years. He was endowed with these

great virtues because in his previous lifetimes he had practiced the cultivation of the Giving of Wealth, Dharma and Fearlessness.

The Buddha teaches that Bodhisattvas must practice the Paramita of Giving. Paramita means perfection. The question is how can we practice giving to the state of perfection? We do so simply by turning our thoughts around, by no longer thinking of ourselves but solely of others. In this way, we will be practicing "giving" anytime, anywhere. But, we will not yet have achieved perfect giving. Perfect giving is to let go, to be willing to give all that we possess and to help all others. Giving and gaining are one. If we have not practiced giving, we will not gain. When we give less, we gain less. When we give more, we gain more. Do you have fears, worries? Do you have birth and death, reincarnation? Why aren't you willing to discard them? Giving is to part with all of these to attain great perfection and great freedom. This is the ultimate perfect giving, the Paramita of Giving. We start by parting with our material possessions and gradually part with everything. If we are able to let go of our afflictions, birth and death, then we will uncover the purity, wisdom and abilities within our self-nature.

The Paramita of Abiding by the Precepts

The second Paramita is Precept Observation, which means abiding by customs, rules, regulations and laws. Everything, big or small, worldly or beyond, has their own natural laws. We need to follow these for only by doing so, can we accomplish an undertaking quickly and perfectly. For example, within the family, we need domestic etiquette or seniority in human relationships to guide the behavior between parents and children, husband and wife, brothers and sisters. The manner of how things are accomplished needs to be followed. This is similar to cooking rice; we wash it, put it into the pot and then cook it. Without following the proper sequence, the rice will not be properly cooked.

This is even truer in learning and practicing Buddhism. If we want to achieve, we must follow the guidelines told to us by the Buddha: the Four Great Vows of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. First, we vow to help all living beings. After that, we discard all worries, habits and attachments, to end all afflictions. Only then do we master all methods. Finally, we attain Buddhahood. Only when we become Buddhas, will we have the ability to help all beings and thus perfectly achieve the First Great Vow, "Sentient be-

ings are innumerable, I vow to help them all".

Some may ask, "Is it really necessary to attain Buddhahood? Won't it be enough to become a Bodhisattva?" Although a Bodhisattva can help beings, he is unable to help a Bodhisattva who is equal or higher in attainment. For example, an Equal-enlightenment Bodhisattva cannot help another Equal-enlightenment Bodhisattva. However, a Buddha can help them as well as all others. Therefore, only when we attain Buddhahood, can we perfectly help all beings in the universe. With such a vow, we can generate the great compassion to help others, to be diligent in severing our afflictions and mastering all methods.

Today, many practitioners have not yet sincerely generated their vows although they recite them daily. Why do I say this? Because they still have the mind of discrimination: ideas of favoring and disfavoring, self and other, love and hate. Consequently, they practice discrimination. They help people they like and ignore those they dislike. Theirs is not a genuine vow, is not a perfect vow. A perfect vow is that of a Bodhisattva and arises from the non-discriminatory mind. The Bodhi mind. It is wonderful, inconceivable and far beyond the minds of ordinary people.

The Paramita of Patience

In whatever we do, we need to exercise patience. As stated in the Diamond Sutra, "All natural laws of the universe attribute their success to patience". Without it, we cannot succeed in anything. For example, to complete our college education, we have to be patient for four years. This audience needs to be patient to sit here for two hours listening to my lecture before you achieve perfection in this lesson. Without patience, we can never achieve anything, no matter how good our conditions are. Of the Six Paramitas, Buddha Shakyamuni in the Diamond Sutra stressed giving and patience in particular. They are the keys to success in cultivation.

It has been said that "It is difficult to handle matters, but it is even more difficult to interact with people". It was not so difficult to interact with people in the past, but now, it is. Why? Education in the past taught people the proper manner and behavior in which to conduct themselves. Today it teaches people how to make a living. It is no wonder that we do not know how to conduct ourselves. We are unable to understand the changing of our own emotions, much less those of others. Therefore, it has be-

come increasingly difficult to get along with other people.

There are three categories of patience. First, tolerate the injuries of physical and verbal abuse. Patience is a virtue. With patience, we will have a quiet and pure mind; thus, it will be easier to attain deep concentration and achievement. When we successfully practice patience, we will gain the greatest good fortune. Second, we would do well to be patient with variations of the natural elements, hot and cold, summer and winter, hunger and thirst, as well as natural disasters.

Third, be patient in the arduous course of our practice. Before attaining the joy of cultivation and before of our cultivation becomes strong, we will encounter many obstacles. However, once we get through this phase, we attain happiness. Why? Because we are on the right path. This is like traveling on an expressway. Before we can get on it, we keep circling and driving around trying to find the entrance. This is very frustrating because there are many cars in our way and we cannot drive fast. We have to remain patient. Once we get on the expressway, it is much more pleasant because traffic moves smoother and faster with no hindrances. Our practice of Buddhism is like this.

In the beginning, we move around, trying different methods and schools. Which one shall I choose? What shall I learn? Some people are fortunate because they only spend a few years to find the right method. Others are not so fortunate, and may take ten to twenty years or even a lifetime in the attempt to find the right method. Fortune is the result of our good root, merit and virtue, cause and condition. With these, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will surely help us, as they never abandon anyone. And once we have the mind to accept their teachings, we will be helped by the Buddha to find awakening. Then our future will be bright.

Why, does the Buddha not simply tell us with what we need to know? He did. But we did not listen. We were told the method, but thought to ourselves, "Well this may not be a good method. I heard that another one is better". We have thus argued with the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. So, they have chosen not to come to us. Please carefully consider this. We need to be very patient before we can attain achievement. Without patience, we cannot advance to a higher stage, for patience is the prerequisite for deep concentration and diligence.

The Paramita of Diligence

The Chinese word for diligence is comprised of two characters meaning perseverance in a specialized field and progress. The two need to work together. Buddhism is neither conservative nor backward, but seeks daily improvement. Some says that Buddhism is no longer relevant. These remarks are erroneous because the people who said them did not know the Paramita of Diligence. Progress is good, but more important is progress with diligence. Currently, there are many great scientists in the west who have made many discoveries, they persevered, they did research everyday and never stopped. The same applies to learning Buddhism. We practice diligence when we choose one school or method and stay focused on our selection, studying until we excel in it, before advancing to another method. It is not effective to concentrate on different methods at the same time. Once we understand one method, we will understand all of them. This is known as "Once we achieve in one, we achieve in all". If we try to practice many methods before we are enlightened, they will become obstacles. Let me tell you what happened to one monk who specialized in the Buddha Name Chanting Method.

In the beginning of this century, Master Di-Xian had a student who became a monk at the age of forty so the student was almost the same age as the Master. The two had been childhood friends. Master Di-Xian, who was from a well to do family, had received a good education. However, his childhood friend was from a poor family and had received little education. When the friend grew up, he could only do manual labor and thus had a very difficult life.

One time, he went to visit Master Di-Xian. After staying at the temple for a few days, he told the Master that he too wanted to become a monk. "Why?" asked the Master. "Because life is too hard and I want to be a monk." replied his friend. The Master initially denied this request because he felt the rigorous training and sutra memorization would prove too much for someone who was illiterate and much older than novice monks usually are. The other monks would look down upon his friend. Feeling everything would prove too much for his friend, the Master denied the request.

But the friend persisted and so the master gave in. Master Di-Xian said to him, "I will accept you as a monk. But I don't think you need to take the vows of abiding by the precepts because you may not stand the rigor of the fifty-three day training. There are

many deserted temples in the countryside, I will find you one to stay in." The Master arranged for some practitioners to provide meals for the new monk. He then taught his friend to chant "Namo Amituofo". "Just recite this phrase over and over. When you are tired, take a rest, when rested, resume your chanting. I am sure that you will greatly benefit from this".

And so the new monk isolated himself in the small temple and concentrated solely on his chanting. Three years later, he went to visit friends and relatives. He came back and told the woman, who had been doing the cooking for him, "There is no need to prepare food for me tomorrow". The woman thought the monk, who had not left the temple for three years had decided to re-visit his friends again the following day.

The next day, she went by the temple to see if he had returned. She went to the temple and called. Receiving no reply she went into the temple and found him standing, with his recitation beads in his hand. She greeted him but received no response. When she moved closer to him, she realized that he was dead but still standing! Never having seen anything like this before in her life, she rushed off to ask the others who were looking after the monk, what to do. They sent a message to the Master's temple in-

forming him of the strange occurrence and asking what to do.

Due to difficulties in traveling, it took Master Di-Xian three days to arrive at his friend's temple. He understood that his old friend had been born into the Western Pure Land. He looked at the still standing dead friend and said admiringly to him, "You have proved that your decision three years ago to become a monk was a fruitful one. Not one of the Dharma masters or abbots at all the famous way places can match your achievement." For three years, the uneducated monk had done nothing but recite "Namo Amituofo". His single-minded, ceaseless recitation had resulted in his achievement of being freed from the cycle of birth and death and of being born into the Western Pure Land.

The practice of diligence is important regardless of what we are doing. Whether chanting "Amituofo", sitting in meditation, chanting mantras, or studying sutras, we need to practice diligence. In studying sutras, if we want to help ourselves as well as others, it would be best to specialize in just one sutra for study and lecturing. In this way, each time we study and lecture, we will reach a new state of mind, we will improve each time. A person who lectures on The Amitabha Sutra for ten years will become Bud-

dha Amitabha. A person, who lectures on the "Universal Door Chapter" for ten years, will become Guan Yin Bodhisattva. A person, who tries to learn ten sutras in ten years, will become a jack of all trade and a master of none. Now we can see how important diligence is!

Years ago, when I was a professor at the Buddha Light Temple, a Buddhist university in Taiwan, I recommended to the principal that each student specialize in only one single sutra, "This way in ten to twenty years, your Buddha Light will shine over the entire world". However, my idea was not accepted. If it had been, we would now have many experts giving Dharma talks. What a wonderful accomplishment that would have been! In this way people who wanted a talk on the Amitabha Sutra, would have Buddha Amitabha to speak. People, who wanted a talk on the Earth Treasure Sutra, would have Earth Treasure Bodhisattva to speak. Every graduate from the university would have become an expert! Only in this way can Buddhism become widely accepted.

So, I hope that all those who give Dharma talks will become experts instead of general scholars. For while such students appear to be knowledgeable in many areas, but actually they are incapable of mas-

tering anything. On the contrary, students who specialize exclusively in one subject will turn out to be versatile experts. All the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are versatile, but they all concentrate on their respective teaching. To be diligent is to delve deeply into one method. The virtue and benefits of practicing the Paramita of Diligence in this way are infinite.

The Paramita of Deep Concentration

The fifth Paramita is deep concentration, which includes the concentration levels practiced within the heavenly realms and beyond. The concentration of the heavenly realms is comprised of eight levels. If we succeed in our cultivation of them, we will be born into the higher heavens. Beyond the heavenly realms, deep concentration is found in the realms of Arhats and Mahayana Bodhisattvas. Finally, the highest level of concentration is that practiced by all Buddhas. The key to all methods of practice lies in deep concentration.

It is a mistake to think that only Zen Buddhism practices deep concentration. Pure Land Buddhism uses Buddha Name Chanting to concentrate the mind. Tiantai Buddhism practices tranquility and contemplation, which is another form of deep con-

centration. Tibetan Buddhism uses the Three Mystic Practices, the three karmas of body, mouth, mind corresponding to those of the Buddha. So, although different schools use different terms, they all practice deep concentration. Therefore, in the Six Paramitas, concentration encompasses the above forms as well as all the phenomena in our daily lives.

What is this concentration? Being the master of our mind. We have goals, which will never be changed or influenced by the environment. Scientist succeeds in their research because they do not allow themselves to be distracted by other concerns. So, they attain a scientific concentration. When we successfully practice the Buddha Name Chanting Method, we will attain the Buddha Name Chanting Samadhi, as did Master Di-Xian's student. If we are able to endure, we will become patient and thus be able to persevere and progress and thus attain deep concentration, which is the essence of our practice.

In the Platform Sutra, the Sixth Patriarch Master Hui-Neng explained that deep concentration was more than just sitting in meditation. He himself reached awakening upon listening to the Diamond Sutra. Therefore, all of his lectures were based on the principles in this sutra. He said that meditation is not being attached to any phenomena. Concentration

is sustaining the mind of tranquility. In the Diamond Sutra, Buddha Shakyamuni taught the proper attitude to have when encouraging others to practice Buddhism, "Do not attach to changing form, maintain the mind of stillness, do not be moved".

The Flower Adornment Sutra tells us of the fifty-three visits of Sudhana. When Sudhana went to visit Yuxiang, a venerable sage who practiced deep concentration, the boy could not find the old man. Where was he? The sage was not found to be sitting in meditation at home or in the way place. He was found roaming around a market. What was he doing there? Maintaining the mind of tranquility by practicing deep concentration and the principle of not attaching to phenomena. He was not sitting cross-legged facing a wall for hours, a position we often admire and expect of a master. We often find ourselves looking down on the Master of deep concentration whom we see bustling around in excitement. We do not yet realize that such a Master has reached a much higher level of attainment than the practitioner we may see in the lotus position has. A higher level of deep concentration or Samadhi can exist in all acts.

Why is deep concentration so important? Why did the Buddha caution us to stay away from form

and to remain unmoved in our heart? Because all phenomena are illusory, like dreams, bubbles and shadows, unattainable. The Buddha sees through everything and urges us not to give rise to any discriminatory thoughts and attachments. If we can do so, then we will uncover our true self-nature and attain the Buddha's understanding of all things in the universe. This is the Paramita of Wisdom.

The Paramita of Wisdom

The Sixth Paramita is intuitive wisdom. We apply it in our daily lives, as we learn the Bodhisattva way. We know everything around us but we do not cling to it as we do our best to help others. Why? This act of helping others originates from the thought and practice of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, "Unconditional compassion for all others as we are all one entity". This is like a person naturally using the left hand to brush away a mosquito that is biting the right hand. Would the left hand ask why it should help the right hand? Of course not. They are part of the same body.

Today, we have temporarily lost our self-nature, not knowing that all beings and we are one entity. So we discriminate between others and ourselves

becoming perplexed and obsessed, spreading confusion, committing wrongdoings and thus bringing sufferings to others and ourselves. The Buddha taught us how to break through delusion so that we would awaken to the truth that helping others is helping ourselves. Such a heart of compassion is unconditional because it originates from understanding of "Unconditional compassion for all others as we are all one entity".

In conclusion, everything has its own methods and continuity. This is abiding by the precepts. With endurance and perseverance, we will have patience. To specialize without slacking is diligence. To be master of our mind and not to be swayed by external condition is concentration. To thoroughly understand all phenomena is wisdom. Therefore, the Buddha taught us to adopt the Six Pararnitas of giving, abiding by the precepts, patience, diligence, deep concentration and wisdom into our daily lives. In this way, we will be practicing the Bodhisattva way. It is a mistake to think that once we have accepted the Bodhisattva precepts, we will automatically become a Bodhisattva. If we are ignorant of the Six Paramitas and thus cannot apply them, then even if we have accepted the Bodhisattva precepts, we will be no more than clay idols unable to

even help ourselves.

The Ten Great Vows of Universal
Worthy Bodhisattva

Only when we have applied the first four of the five guidelines, the Conditions, the Six Principles of Harmony, the Three Learnings and the Six Paramitas will we truly be a student of the Buddha and be close to Bodhisattvas. Based on the foundation of the Six Paramitas, we can progress to the next level of our practice, which is comprised of the Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva. These vows were taught to us by the Buddha in the Flower Adornment Sutra. This is the last stage of our cultivation leading to Buddhahood. We cannot practice the Six Paramitas and advance to the Ten Great Vows until we have fulfilled the first four guidelines. The main characteristic of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva is an immeasurably broad and compassionate heart. Every one of his vows is complete and perfect.

The First Vow: To Pay Respect to all Buddhas.

Who are Buddhas? We read the Flower Adorn-

ment Sutra, "Sentient or insentient, all attain wisdom". So all beings that have self-awareness and all things such as plants and minerals are Buddhas-to-Be. With respect for all beings and things, not just the present Buddhas, we will foster the heart of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva. His heart is different from that of most Bodhisattvas.

Buddhist practitioners are respectful to the Buddha, but this respect may not be completely sincere. Why not? If we are listening to a lecture, but suddenly think of an important appointment or have a call on our telephone or pager, what will we do? We will leave the hall immediately go to attend to business or the telephone call! So, our respect and belief are not genuine. If we were truly sincere and respectful, we would regard attendance at the lecture as our prime concern. But in fact, if we are listening to a talk on the sutra and someone tells us that there is a business opportunity that will us make a million US dollars, we will immediately leave the lecture hall. Our respect and belief are not genuine enough.

The profound respect of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva is perfectly genuine, regardless of whether it is for Buddhas, sentient beings or insentient objects. Why? He understands that they all have a Buddha nature. Therefore, offending a sentient being is of-

fending a Buddha. Thus, we too should respect all beings.

Then how do we act towards tables and chairs? They are also to be respected as beings, for everything is the result of the joint force of all causes. What is the right way to show respect for all things? Prostrate to it three times a day? No, that is the way of a Buddhist idiot. To show respect to material objects, we just keep them orderly and clean. For example, books go neatly into a bookcase. When doing something, we are earnest and responsible, trying to do it the best we can. We treat people, matters and objects with equal respect. This is the virtuous way of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva. This is the expanded and perfected way of the Six Paramitas, and therefore the most perfect and effective way for Buddhist cultivation.

The Second Vow: To Praise the "Thus Come One"

The second vow is to "Praise the 'Thus Come One'". Since, the first vow is "To respect all Buddhas" why don't we rephrase them as one, "Praise and respect all Buddhas"? There is a profound meaning within these two vows. "Respect all Buddhas" applies to behavior. When considering the form, we

are to show respect for everybody, regardless of whether they are good or bad. Also, we are to respect all laws whether they are accepted or heretical. "Praise the 'Thus Come One'" applies to nature. So, there is a difference. We admire the good but not the bad, although we respect the latter as well. And therein lies the difference.

In the Flower Adornment Sutra, Sudhana understood this very well. He respected and praised nearly every one of the fifty-three spiritual guides he visited. However, three of them he respected but did not praise; Fasumiduo, Shengrepoluomen, and Ganluhuowang. The first was a prostitute and symbolized lust or greed. The second was a heretic and symbolized ignorance. The third was hot-tempered and symbolized anger, punishing those who caused him the slightest offense by plunging them into boiling oil or driving them into a hill of daggers. These three symbolized the Three Poisons of greed, anger and ignorance. To Sudhana, the three were to be respected but not praised. So, we see that praise is linked to virtue.

Only good characteristics and accepted laws deserve praise. But we still respect all beings and things because respect reflects purity of mind and the virtue of respecting others equally. We respect

heretical beliefs while we praise accepted ones such as Christianity, which helps raise people to the heaven realms. This is not achieving the perfect, complete enlightenment, but it is infinitely better than heretical beliefs that will lead people to fall into the three lower realms. So, we praise Christianity. However, we never praise cults for they encourage people to commit wrongdoings.

We can see that there is a big difference between the first and second vows although both come from a pure and perfect intention.

The Third Vow: To Make Offerings Extensively

The primary characteristic of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva is an immeasurably broad and compassionate mind, which in Mahayana Buddhism is considered as the perfect function of the self-nature. Ordinary Bodhisattvas have seen to their self-nature, but it is partial, not perfect. Only the virtuous character of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva is perfect. All his vows are directed to all beings in the universe. Herein lies the difference between Universal Worthy Bodhisattva and ordinary Bodhisattvas who practice just the Six Paramitas. An offering to one Buddha is an offering to all Buddhas. His offerings are not only

made to Buddhas but also to sentient and non-sentient beings. Therefore, one is all, and all is one. With this great broad-mindedness, we can attain the non-discriminatory and boundless perfection.

Universal Worthy Bodhisattva told us that of all the many kinds of offerings, that of the teachings is supreme. However, only the Buddha's teachings can help sentient beings break through confusion and delusion, to uncover the perfect self-nature, to become enlightened. No other kind of offering can do this. As Buddhism is an education, we are to honor the teacher and revere his or her teachings. Only in this way, can we attain perfect, complete enlightenment.

In the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni, which sutra is the most important? In the Sui and Tang dynasties, over a thousand years ago, great Buddhist scholars studied and compared all of the sutras from Buddha Shakyamuni's forty-nine years of teaching. They agreed that the Flower Adornment Sutra was the most important. So, the Flower Adornment Sutra was commonly acknowledged as the perfect teaching. The scholars then made comparisons between the Infinite Life Sutra and the Flower Adornment Sutra and concluded that the Infinite Life Sutra was higher than the Flower Adornment Sutra. They

explained that the Flower Adornment Sutra and the Lotus Sutra are the two most important. In Chinese Buddhism, they are called the "First Vehicle Perfect Teachings". Both function as the guide to the Infinite Life Sutra. Therefore, the Infinite Life Sutra is really the number one teaching.

When I first read this, I was very pleased because it agreed with my personal experience. It was the Flower Adornment Sutra that guided me to Pure Land Buddhism. I lectured on this sutra for seventeen years. Later, I only lectured on the "Chapter of Universal Worthy's Conduct and Vows" from the Flower Adornment Sutra. During these seventeen years, I deeply comprehended the meaning of the Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva in guiding beings to the Western Pure Land. This Pure Land is the essence and the final destination of the Flower Adornment. From this experience, I realized that the ancient masters were right.

So we know what is the best and most important among all of Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings. However, it was only after Mr. Lian-Ju Xia, a Buddhist layman, edited a compilation of the five versions of the original translations of the Infinite Life Sutra that we could enjoy a perfect benefit. The great project of editing such an extensive literary collection dem-

onstrated that Mr. Xia was not an ordinary person, but rather the manifestation of a Great Bodhisattva. This great being felt compassion for the sentient beings in our world, which revealed that the opportunity for many beings to attain Buddhahood, had matured. Thus, he manifested in our world to compile the sutra versions and propagate the Pure Land method during our Dharma Ending Age.

When I visited Beijing, a student of Mr. Xia presented me with a photo of his teacher. Upon returning to Taiwan, I printed an enlarged copy of the photo. Although it is not very clear due to repeated duplications, an amazing phenomenon is apparent. Behind Mr. Xia's head the image of a Buddha appears. Light is emitting from this image as well as from below his shoes. Although the photo has been reduplicated many times, we can still clearly see that the image over Mr. Xia's head is that of a Buddha sitting on his lotus seat. We placed the photo in a prominent position to express our gratitude to this great Bodhisattva for having given us such a gift and for guiding us in our cultivation and propagation of Buddhism.

The Infinite Life Sutra is the most important sutra for helping all beings to attain Buddhahood. It contains forty-eight chapters. Which chapter is number

one? Of all the chapters, chapter six is the most important. It tells us of Buddha Amitabha's Forty-eight Vows. When we read the Infinite Life Sutra, we see that Buddha Shakyamuni accorded with these vows when he introduced the history and background of the Pure Land.

Which of these vows is number one? The great scholars and monks in ancient China agreed that the eighteenth vow is number one. It tells us that ten recitations of Buddha Amitabha's name will result in birth into the Pure Land. In my early years of study, I questioned whether the Buddha had the ability to help a person to immediately become a Buddha, even if they were is doomed to birth in the Avici Hell, the lowest of the hell realms. If Buddha was unable to accomplish this, then his wisdom and ability were limited and saying that he had all virtues and perfect abilities was a compliment rather than a fact. However, if the Buddha was capable of helping such a person become a Buddha, then I would believe that he was really perfect in wisdom and capable and thus worthy of our admiration. This question remained unanswered until after I read the forty-eight vows of Buddha Amitabha in the sutra. Then I realized that the Buddha's wisdom and virtuous character are indeed perfect and universal.

The Buddha is indeed capable of helping a person who has committed serious offenses to become a Buddha. The question lies in whether or not the person believes and accepts. If not, then the fault lies with the individual, not the Buddha. So, after reading the Infinite Life Sutra we know that anyone who sincerely practices the recitation method will surely succeed.

In the earlier example of Master Di-Xian and the student who so successfully chanted "Namo Amituofo" for three years, the student knew in advance when he would be born into the Pure Land. He told the woman who brought his food daily, that she need not bring it the following day. After he passed away from this world, he remained in a standing position for three days waiting for his master to come to make final arrangements. His birth into the Pure Land was into the highest level. His accomplishment is proof of the eighteenth vow, which explains to us that this birth can be accomplished with just ten recitations of "Amitabha".

Anyone who firmly believes in this method surely has good roots, great merits and virtues. The Infinite Life Sutra explains that the monk's rebirth after such a short time of practice was due to his having made offerings to innumerable Buddhas in previous life-

times. As a result, he was able to believe and practice. Without his good roots from previous lifetimes, he would not have been able to believe regardless of what his teacher had said.

The name of Buddha Amitabha contains infinite meanings. It is the name of the universe, so it includes everything. If we want to know the meaning of the name, we can read the Infinite Life Sutra, the explanation of the name. If we want to understand the Infinite Life Sutra we can read the Flower Adornment Sutra, for it is a detailed explanation of the Infinite Life Sutra. If we want to understand the Flower Adornment Sutra we can read the entire Great Canon for it is the detailed explanation of the Flower Adornment Sutra. By using this method to understand the sutras, we will know that the merit and virtue of the name of Buddha Amitabha are truly extraordinary.

This name alone contains all of Buddhism as well as all laws throughout the universe. Therefore, to chant this name is to chant all sutras. During the reign of Emperor Qianlong, there was a famous monk Ciyun Guan-ding. Among his many works is the Directory to the Visualization Sutra, which tells us that when we seek escape from disasters we can resort to reciting sutras, chanting mantras or drawing

divination slips. However, if a person has committed grave wrongdoings then the only thing that will work is to recite "Namo Amituofo". From this, we understand that this is the best method to follow when facing disaster. Many people do not know this so they resort to other methods. Therefore a person who is ill may recite the Medicine Master Sutra and when faced with disaster may recite the "Universal Door Chapter". This person does not know that the merits and virtues of Buddha Name Recitation make it the number one method.

Then why didn't Buddha Shakyamuni tell us so directly? Why did he teach us so many sutras and methods? Because many people do not believe in the Buddha Name Recitation Method. So, he kept the finest method for last. This is similar to what we see in the Taiwan Palace Museum. Most people consider the beautiful jade collection of the Qing dynasty, to be more valuable than the bronze ware, which resembles pieces of metal, not realizing the bronze ware is the most valuable part of the collection in the museum. Similarly, most people do not realize the true value of Buddha Name Recitation. So, the Buddha had to teach all the sutras to guide sentient beings to the Pure Land.

Master Shan Dao told us that the only purpose

for all Buddhas to manifest in the world is to tell us of the original vows of Buddha Amitabha. Today, we can truly understand, cultivate and propagate the Pure Land method. Truthfully, this is due to the support of the Triple Jewels. Also, the opportunities today for sentient beings to achieve attainment are very good. In the past five to six years, millions of copies of the Infinite Life Sutra have been printed and spread throughout the world. I have traveled around the world introducing and recommending this sutra. Many people have liked and accepted it. Seeing you here working and practicing so earnestly, I am very pleased and feel that my hard work has been rewarded. Therefore, if we can practice and widely propagate this method, than I can say that we have perfectly fulfilled the vow to "Make Offerings Extensively".

The methods used by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are infinite in number. They are the display of great compassion and lead to birth into the Pure Land. For example, Universal Worthy Bodhisattva is the founder of Tibetan Buddhism. Also, Zhuen Ti Bodhisattva, one of the great patriarchs of Tibetan Buddhism, is a manifestation of Guan Yin Bodhisattva. Both Universal Worthy Bodhisattva and Guan Yin Bodhisattva urge us to seek birth into the Western Pure Land. We

ordinary people discriminate between Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism, but Buddhas and Bodhisattvas with their perfect freedom and non-discriminatory minds do not discriminate among the different schools. All eighty-four thousand methods lead to the same goal. With this understanding, we will naturally respect all methods and schools.

The Fourth Vow: To Regret Karmic Obstacles

Everybody has karmic obstacles. Every thought in a person's mind causes a karmic act, which in turn will certainly results in an obstacle. What is obstructed? Our true nature, within which there is infinite wisdom and virtue. There are two types of obstacles: those caused by afflictions and those caused by knowledge-attachment. We create these constantly. The Buddha told us in the Flower Adornment Sutra, "All beings have the Buddha's wisdom and virtue but cannot attain them due to their wandering thoughts and attachments". Like a doctor, the Buddha pointed out the root cause of our illness. Attachments are the root cause of afflictions and wandering thoughts are the root cause of knowledge-attachment. For all methods, learning and cultivation is simply a matter of doing away with

our wandering thoughts and attachments. Once we do this, we will uncover our Buddha nature. All the methods in Buddhism teach us to regret our karmic obstacles. Thus, to regret karmic obstacles is the key to our cultivation.

However, it is very difficult to remove these obstacles. Of all the methods, that of the Pure Land is unique. For even if we have committed an extremely grave crime such as one of the Five Deadly Offenses and are thus destined to fall into the Avici Hell, we can still remove our obstacles and attain Buddhahood. We need to feel remorse, vow to change and practice Buddha Name Recitation and accord with the Buddha's teachings to attain birth into the Pure Land. This is why Master Ciyun said that this recitation method alone is able to dispel obstacles, for they cannot be dispelled reciting sutras or mantras.

In the past few years there was a theory being circulated that said a person with remaining karma could not attain birth into the Pure Land. This greatly shocked and panicked Pure Land practitioner. When I went to Los Angeles in1984, I was asked if this was really true. On hearing the question, I smiled and said, "If it were true that no person with remaining karma could be born into the Pure Land, then the

only person there would be Buddha Amitabha. What then is the use of going there?" The person questioned "Why?" I replied, "Have you ever heard of the four lands, three kinds and nine grades in the Pure Land?" He replied that he had read of them in the sutras. I told him "If no one with remaining karma had been born into the Pure Land, why are there four lands, three kinds and nine levels?" With this, he understood.

The division of lands, kinds and levels is based on the amount of remaining karma. With heavier karma, we are born into a lower grade: with light karma, a higher grade. I then explained, "Guan Yin Bodhisattva, Manjushri Bodhisattva and Universal Worthy Bodhisattva are all Equal Enlightenment Bodhisattvas. The sutras tell us that even Bodhisattvas of this high level still possess one degree of remaining ignorance. Isn't this a karmic act?" My questioner was relieved at my words. So even an Equal Enlightenment Bodhisattva goes to the Pure Land with remaining karma. Buddha Amitabha is the only one there without any karma. I then concluded, "Who says that a person with remaining karma cannot be born into the Pure Land"! My words seemed to help as the individual laughed merrily for he began to see that all beings in the Pure Land had gone there with

their remaining karma.

Buddhism teaches us not to be angry or hold grudges against others. So, I added "It is not wrong to advocate extinguishing karma for it is good to carry as little karma to the Pure Land as possible. In this way the person can attain birth into a higher level".

Later, I went to New York. As soon as I got off the plane, I was asked the same question. People did not know the truth. As soon as I explained, they understood that it was not wrong to have karma. Extinguishing karma is good for it is feeling remorse for the obstacle.

Buddha Name Recitation is a sincere act of feeling remorse and vowing to change. However, when feeling remorse we must be sure that our heart is the same as Buddha Amitabha's, our vow is the same as Buddha Amitabha's and our behavior corresponds with that of Buddha Amitabha. How do we do this? With sincerity by not merely reciting with our mouth but with our heart. In this way, we will perfectly fulfill the teachings in the sutras. Only by doing so can it be said that we are true cultivators of the recitation method. Be sure that with every thought of "Amituofo" we have the same thought and vow as the Buddha. We need to turn his forty-eight vows

into our own. Only in this way can we be rid of karmic transgressions.

The Fifth Vow: To be Joyful over Others Meritorious Deeds

This requires us to go against what seems so natural to us, jealousy. It is natural for humans to have this emotion. For example, small children appear unhappy when others receive more candy than they do. This is jealousy and it is a major obstacle to our self-cultivation. Universal Worthy Bodhisattva largely attributed this vow to jealousy. He taught us not to feel envy but rather to regard others meritorious deeds as our own and to further assist them in their endeavors.

This vow tell us to not only feel joyful over others meritorious deeds but to help them accomplish even more. If we are unable to offer assistance, we can at least express our joy and admiration. However, if we are able to offer assistance then it will be a true fulfillment of this vow. Remember that helping others is helping ourselves. We would do well to love and tolerate those who exceed us for in this way we will accomplish the virtue of this vow.

In ancient times, education in China was such

that each succeeding generation was expected to exceed the current generation in accomplishment. If not, the education was considered a failure. People today however, are afraid that others will exceed them. When they teach others, they may hold back important information. This is called grudging teaching, which will incur the retribution of ignorance. Grudging money incurs poverty. These people are not aware how serious the retribution will be. We should strive to continuously progress in our cultivation of virtue, acquisition of knowledge, development of ability and improvement of the standard of life. Only in this way will education be successful with the entire society progressing.

It will be our responsibility in the next era to educate others. If we fail to attain virtue, knowledge and ability, we will not be able to help the next generation of sentient beings. Why? Look at today's children. The education they receive is leaning more and more towards science and technology while society is becoming increasingly complicated. Therefore, those who have vowed to help others will need to have a purer heart, greater wisdom and higher virtue to cope with the new era and opportunities. Jealousy and hatred are extremely harmful to our self-nature and hence should be extinguished.

So, the virtue of being joyful over other's meritorious deeds will be even more important.

The Sixth Vow: To Appeal to the Buddha to Turn the Dharma Wheel

Since we benefit from the education we receive from the Buddha, what can we do to repay his kindness? Nowadays, most people enshrine and worship him, making daily offerings to his image on an altar. Is this the right way to repay him? No. These are only rituals to remind us not to forget the Buddha's kindness. The Buddha's wish is for all sentient beings to hear the truth, practice accordingly and receive the benefits to attain Buddhahood. The only way we can repay him is to take his heart as our own. Only in this way can we repay our respected teacher. Therefore, we can request the turning of the Dharma-wheel, in other words, we invite knowledgeable masters to teach us about the sutras. This is also the greatest good deed and virtue. Why? Because it brings the teachings to the world. But if no one invites Dharma masters to lecture, they will not have the opportunity to do so. So, people who invite them to give Dharma talks will obtain great merits.

Many people are willing to invite masters to chant or recite believing that they will receive inconceivable good fortune. But actually, they may not understand the meaning of what they are reciting. Therefore, if they invite the Dharma master to give a talk, then the good fortune, merit and virtue are even greater. The listeners will acquire a better understanding of the text and will be more inclined to recite the sutra and follow its teachings.

Unfortunately, if we want to invite a master to give a talk on the sutra today, we will find it hard to find an eligible one since there are so few. Many times, as I have traveled to give talks, I have been told that it was very difficult to find masters to speak. I have smiled and said, " Having a master to teach is a result. We need to plant the cause before we can attain this result. You are wishing for it without having planted the cause! Where on earth can we find such a deal!" What does "planting the cause" mean in this instance? To help train Dharma masters.

People like to listen to talks by senior, famous masters. Younger, unknown masters are normally inexperienced so fewer people attend their talks. Thus they become discouraged and thinking that giving talks is too difficult, they return to conducting ceremonial services. What should we do to help these

less experienced masters? The younger and more inexperienced they are the more we need to attend their talks. This will encourage them to continue to practice and to improve.

However, even if we attend every one of the master's talks, we should not praise them. Unfounded praise is more harmful than slander. People may become very angry when slandered but for a person with integrity and enthusiasm the slander will only serve as a stimulant. The more embarrassed he or she becomes, the more determined he or she becomes. This person will do their utmost to achieve. However, if people praise and eulogize the master, he or she will think that they are so good that further improvement is unnecessary. This thinking leads to arrogance. Therefore, we should neither praise inexperienced masters nor make offerings to them. With too much money and fame, they will soon become tainted.

A person gives rise to the Bodhisattva heart and becomes a monk or nun but later becomes corrupt due to receiving excessive praise and offerings from followers. So, these followers are to blame for ruining this monk or nun. When the monk or nun receives the retribution, the followers will share the responsibility. Then whom should we make offerings to? The

person with a firm mind for he or she will neither feel excited when praised, nor troubled when slandered. Only they deserve to receive the praise and admiration for only they will not be harmed by it. We would do well to strongly recommend this master to others, so that the master can help more beings.

To accept praise and offerings is very difficult. Buddhists say that, "A single grain from the donor is heavier than Mt. Sumeru. I will serve the donor like a bull in my next life if I do not transcend the six realms of reincarnation at the end of this one". So it is not easy to properly accept offerings. Even Buddhas and Bodhisattvas do not enjoy the offerings made to them, let alone we ordinary beings. However, when the donor wishes to foster good deeds and virtues, the master should accept the offerings and then pass them on to others.

Earlier in this century, Master Yin-Guang set a good example for us. His innumerable followers gave many offerings. He used all the money to print sutras. Following his example, I have also used all the money donated to print sutras. I then freely distribute the books to everybody. I had the thought that if I did not attain achievement in this life and transcend the six realms, I would at least not become a bull in my next life because everyone who had received

my books would help to pay the debt for me! This is the transference of giving. In this way, everybody would share in the good fortune. This is the proper way of accepting offerings from followers.

Using the offerings for personal use is absolutely wrong and immoral. Even if the money is used to build a way place, the way place has to be used to promote Buddhism. Only in this way can the donor receive the merits and virtues. Otherwise, without propagation and cultivation, the way place will become a place of competition and conflict. Therefore, we must be very careful if we want to build a way place. My late teacher, Mr. Lee, once said, "When building the way place, everybody is a Bodhisattva doing their best to complete the work. But after the way place is built, everybody becomes a demon." Why? Because they are all trying to grab power and profit. They have forgotten their initial genuine intention in building the way place.

We have to be very careful when making offerings to a Dharma Master. The Buddha told us that there were four kinds of offerings that could be made to monks and nuns. The first is food and drink, without which they cannot survive. The second is clothing. If it becomes worn, provide new ones if there is not another one available. The third is medi-

cine to be provided upon illness. The fourth is bedding.

Nowadays, followers offer monks and nuns houses and whatever good things they can afford. Then they live such a comfortable life that they no longer want to go to the Pure Land! The present life becomes so satisfactory that the goal to transcend the cycle of birth and death to attain Buddhahood fades. This is very harmful to their cultivation. They have left their secular home behind. To present them with a house is to urge them to return home. Isn't this harmful to them? Having received ownership of a house, they have again acquired property. This is regression of their cultivation.

The follower is then actually a criminal who will ruin the master. These people do not understand that this is harming Buddhism and damaging the spirit of the Triple Jewels. They think they are doing a good deed and accumulating much merit. When they see the King of the hell realms after they die, they will feel bewilderment at their punishment. We must have true wisdom to cultivate good fortune, merits and virtue in Buddhism. Followers need to be told of this but many masters are reluctant to tell them so because then they may not receive offerings.

What about me? I am determined to go to the Pure Land. I will not remain in this world to continue to bear the suffering. Thus, to tell the truth, I do not care whether you make offerings to me or not. It would be even better for me if you did not for it would save me a lot of trouble. Because of this, I started the Corporate Body of the Buddha's Educational Foundation, which is devoted to the printing and distribution of Buddhist books. I told the manager "Print more if there are more offerings. Print fewer if there are fewer offerings. There is no need to print any if there are no offerings, which is best".

When too many offerings are received, we have to take the trouble to select among all the Buddhist books to determine which ones are most suitable to print and then decide how best to print them. With no offerings, there would be no worries, no troubles. So we should not seek offerings, seek a way place or ask for anything. Then we will have a pure mind and a quiet heart on our path to enlightenment. Cultivating a pure mind and a quiet heart, helping others to cultivate the same and staying away from fame and profit is true cultivation.

We need to foster novice monks and nuns by placing them in hardships. If we cannot bear to see them experiencing hardship, we are harming them.

When Buddha Shakyamuni was in this world, all of his students had only one meal a day and spent the night sitting under trees. Is this not a life of hardship? If we had been there and felt sorry for them and helped them out of their hardships, how could they have attained enlightenment?

The Buddha taught us to regard hardship as our teacher. Only by living most simply and frugally can we acquire a true Dharma heart and be firmly determined to transcend this world. So, hardships are good for us. If we are not willing to undergo hardship ourselves then we can at least respect those who are and not try to extricate them from their difficulties. Only when we sincerely help inexperienced monks and nuns to improve will we have good masters promoting Buddhism.

The Seventh Vow: To Request the Buddha to Reside in this World

The main purpose of the sixth vow is to introduce Buddhism to all people. If we hope to have accomplishment in our cultivation, the vow to request the turning of the Dharma wheel is not enough. Have you seen anyone attain enlightenment simply by listening to a talk on the sutra only once or twice in his

or her lifetime? If this could happen, then enlightenment would be obtainable only when the Buddha was in the world and unobtainable when he was not. However, with our limited abilities we cannot do this, so we need to request the Buddha to reside in this world. In other words, we need a teacher who is with us every day so that we can be under their constant guidance and thus be able to reach enlightenment.

Years ago, I was asked by Professor Lee about my aspirations. I told him that I wished to travel around the world encouraging others to practice Buddhism. He nodded and told me that this was good, that I could achieve but I could not help others to do so. I asked why. He replied that I could only propagandize. He said that he had lived in Taizhong for more than thirty years and therefore many people had attained achievement. He went on to explain that if he had not lived in Taizhong but had simply visited to lecture once or twice a year than nobody would have had any achievement. To be able to help another, there needs to be an existing affinity. Without this affinity, even a Buddha cannot help us. By travelling around the world propagating Buddhism, we meet many people but the affinities with them are lighter. Staying in one place to conduct regular teachings needs stronger affinities.

I have benefited greatly from my travels as I have been freed from the concept of home. Every day I was either on the road or in a hotel. Where is my home? No home at all. Although I have places to give talks, I usually do not stay there for longer than a few weeks. The shattering of the idea of home has proven to be an escape for me.

If we want to reach any achievement, we need to request the Buddha to remain in this world. The Buddha himself is no longer here but his followers are, be they monks and nuns or laypeople. Those who are knowledgeable and virtuous can be invited to reside in our town or city to give teachings. In this way, we will be constantly under their guidance. It is easy to provide for masters of virtue and character because they lead simple lives. However, the Lecture Hall should look magnificent so that the listeners will like it and will thus develop respect for the way place. However, if the appearance of the hall is mediocre they might look down on the way place. People often set store by appearance and pay less attention to content. Although a person who knows the true value of things does not attach much importance to appearance, a splendid and imposing looking Lecture Hall is necessary for people to see initially.

Although the Lecture and Cultivation Halls are very impressive, the living quarters of the monks and nuns are very simple. If we look at the temples in China, we will understand. Even the head monk lives in a small room. The luxurious exterior rooms are only for laypeople and visitors. By carefully observing this we will know the right manner we need to have and the right methods we need to adopt. Doing so properly will enable Buddhism to take root, grow, blossom and bear fruit wherever we live.

From the above, we can see that among the Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, the first seven are for a Bodhisattvas vows and conduct and the last three are the ways to dedicate all merits.

The Eighth Vow: To Constantly be a Diligent Follower of the Buddha's Teachings

Although the Buddha no longer resides in this world, we still have his sutras to follow and study. Following the sutras is the highest standard in our learning and practicing Buddhism.

The Ninth Vow: To Accord with all Sentient Beings

We need to accord with the wishes of all sentient beings in the universe. This is extremely difficult to do and is why the Chinese say that filial piety and according with others go together. Learning Buddhism is to honor filial piety and to accord with the being's wishes. While according, we need to look for the right opportunities to try to encourage people to stop committing wrongdoings. This will help them to break through delusion and attain enlightenment. However, to do this perfectly, we need to recognize the right way and time and for this, we need wisdom, expediency and flexibility.

The Tenth Vow: To Dedicate all Merits

This means dedicating all of our good deeds and merits to all the sentient beings in the universe. It means broadening our hearts so that the entire universe becomes one entity. Only when we have reached this state can we be said to have attained the Great Perfection.

In our learning and cultivation of the Pure Land, we use the five sutras and one sastra:

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 Perfect Complete Realization of Great Strength Bodhisattva through Buddha Name Recitation" from the Surangama Sutra and
6. Vasubandhu Bodhisattva's Report on the Way to Reaching the Pure Land.

We practice the Five Guidelines:

1. The Three Conditions
2. The Six Harmonies
3. The Three Learnings
4. The Six Paramitas and
5. The Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva.

Very simple, very clear, not at all complicated. If we consistently follow these in our learning and cultivation, we are sure to succeed. In doing so, as an ancient sage said, "if ten thousand practice, ten thousand will succeed." Now we have the principles

and methods of learning and cultivation. How do we interact with people, matters and objects in our daily lives? If we follow the above five guidelines, single-mindedly chant the name of Buddha Amitabha and seek birth into the Pure Land, we will definitely succeed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE RIGHT ORDER OF LEARNING BUDDHISM

Belief, Understanding, Practice and Realization

We have looked at the basis for learning and cultivation and have had a brief introduction to the main practice guidelines. Now, let's look at the creative teaching methods of Buddhism. As Master Qingliang explained, in the Flower Adornment Sutra learning and cultivation can be divided into the four stages of belief, understanding, practice and realization.

The first stage is belief. When we are able to believe then our conditions have matured. There is a saying "the Buddha is unable to help those who have no affinity with him". What is affinity? It is being able to believe. Even a Buddha cannot help someone whose conditions have not yet matured. However, when they have matured, the person will have belief. Then the Buddha can help. Religions are different from Buddhism in that once the believers have faith, they are saved, whereas, the belief in Buddhism, means that we believe in the benefits of Buddhism and accept one of the many methods.

Once we have the belief, we have to have un-

derstanding. Buddhism explains the truth of life and the universe. Only after we have acquired a true understanding of it can we begin our practice. Therefore, practice is based on understanding. If we do not understand the principles and methods, how can we practice? True practice is based on the foundation of principles and correct methods. The ultimate goal of practice is to achieve attainment, to attain the real benefit. What is attainment? It is the application of what we believe, understand and practice in our daily lives, to attain the ultimate enjoyment in life. For example, what we find in the Infinite Life Sutra is just what we think and practice. What we think and practice in our daily lives conforms to the sutra. This is attainment and true reality and this is what makes Buddhism so valuable.

Thus, we need to know the proper sequence of cultivation, which is belief, understanding, practice and attainment. When we speak of belief, first we believe in ourselves. This is where Buddhism differs from religion. In religion the most important criteria is to believe in God. In Buddhism the most important criteria is to believe in ourselves, not something outside of ourselves. We need to believe that we have the same Buddha nature. Believe that originally we were Buddhas. Believe that we are no different from

the Buddhas. Believe that our true nature has become polluted and that once we remove this pollution we will uncover our true self-nature.

However, if we are always dwelling on thoughts that we have heavy karmic obstacles and fear that this will keep us from achieving attainment, then we definitely will not achieve. Why? If we do not believe that we can achieve, then even the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas cannot help us. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas can only help those who help themselves. Therefore, it is crucial that we have this confidence and belief in ourselves.

In addition, we also need to believe in the teachings of the Buddhas. We have been told infinite principles and methods. We will surely succeed as long as we follow them. After we have belief in ourselves, we need to have belief in the Buddha's teachings. Master Ou-Yi described this as believing in principles and in matter. Where does matter come from? From the principle, that is the pure mind of the true nature. All phenomena in the universe arise from the principle. They are related by the endless cycle of cause and effect. A cause gives rise to an effect, which in turn becomes the cause of the next effect. This process continues ceaselessly. Developing understanding and belief in true reality

builds our confidence enabling us to seek thorough understanding of everything. Only in this way can we be free from confusion and doubt, which are obstacles in our cultivation and thus obtain enjoyment and smooth advancement.

In practicing Buddhism, it is most important to accept the teacher's instructions and practice according to the recommended methods. This has been the right way to learn since ancient times. The first requirement was to follow the five-year learning restriction, which was set by the teacher. In so doing so, the teacher took full responsibility for whether the student succeeded or failed. This is the principle of honoring teachers and revering their teachings. This principle, however, no longer holds today for teachers are not responsible and students are not earnest. The principles of teaching are declining and this is the tragedy of our times. Students no longer respect teachers and teachers no longer sincerely help students to achieve.

The five-year learning restriction resulted in the student following just one teacher. It laid the foundation for the Three Learnings of self-discipline, deep concentration and wisdom. It was the responsibility of the teacher to see that the student learned this. Consider Zen Buddhism. What did the teacher ask of

the student for the first five years?, They were assigned a simple manual labor and asked to perform it earnestly, without change, every day. They were also to memorize the sutra. They were to read after completing their work and not to be concerned with anything else. The purpose of this labor was not to treat them as servants.

After a while the student felt bored and would think that he or she had worked very hard for five years without accomplishing anything. In actuality, he or she had acquired much without realizing it. What was acquired? Afflictions were greatly reduced and concentration was increased because of a ban against seeing and listening to many things. If the ban was properly followed, the students attained both good fortune and wisdom. What is good fortune? Working every day in the way place was cultivating the practice of giving. Since monks and nuns had no money to give away, they could work to cultivate the Paramita of Giving. Through the restrictions on listening and reading thereby concentrating the six sense organs, the students also acquired a pure mind and attained deep concentration. This is wisdom. So, the teacher taught the students to cultivate good fortune and establish the foundation of self-discipline, deep concentration

and wisdom. The teaching was designed to be subtle yet effective. With the five-year learning restriction as a base, upon listening to one or two years of Dharma lectures, the students could become enlightened.

In the biographies of well accomplished monks we see that through this method many monks become enlightened in three to five years. Today, however, practitioners can live in a way place for thirty or fifty years, even a lifetime without awakening. They may have read numerous sutras but were still not enlightened. At most, they have memorized some general knowledge about Buddhism, but nothing to sever their afflictions or attain wisdom. So, we must try to find a good teacher for guidance. This advice may seem boring at first. But after the initial stage, we will be truly delighted and joyful in our attainment.

Many of us have made the big mistake at the beginning of our cultivation, of wanting to learn all different methods. Ancient learned monks and nuns started with the second of the Great Vows of Buddhas and Bodhisattva, "Afflictions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them all". In ending all afflictions, we will achieve deep concentration and attain wisdom. Then, the "Ways to practice are boundless, I

vow to master them all". This is the correct order for cultivation. The mistake many people make is to attempt to study extensively without having severed afflictions. Master Qingliang called this " Understanding with no practice". These people concentrate only on understanding while neglecting the practice. They do not try to end their afflictions to cultivate a pure mind. As a result, they develop deviated viewpoints rather than proper views and knowledge.

Practicing the Three Learnings Concurrently

What is the first step in learning Buddhism? Start by reciting one sutra. Do we need to understand it? No. For when we have not ended afflictions, our understanding will be erroneous. Then why do we recite only this sutra? By reciting the sutra, the Three Learnings of self-discipline, deep concentration and wisdom are accomplished together.

Self-discipline requires that we "Do nothing that is bad. Do all that is good". Reciting a sutra can prevent us from generating wandering thoughts so we will be prevented from doing anything that is bad. Sutras are words that flow from the Buddha's true nature. Nothing can surpass these words in virtue.

Therefore, reciting a sutra is doing all that is good and results in the perfection of self-discipline so there is no need to practice the precepts one-by-one.

When reciting a sutra we must focus. By focusing, we cultivate concentration. Clearly enunciating every word correctly without any omission is the practice of wisdom. Therefore reciting the sutra properly is to practice the Three Learnings at the same time. Any attempt to analyze the sutra while reciting is in fact treating the sutra as a worldly book. This will result in none of the Three Learnings being accomplished and is not true cultivation. Never belittle the practice of sutra recitation, as it is the base of cultivation. Reciting for one hour accomplishes one hour of cultivation, reciting for two hours accomplishes two hours of cultivation, etc. Needless to say, the longer the better.

Many of my fellow practitioners in Taiwan and Dallas are reciting the Infinite Life Sutra ten times a day. So far, some may have chanted the sutra over two thousand times, thus they are very familiar with the text and only need thirty to forty-five minutes to finish one sutra. Reciting ten times thus means five or six hours of practicing self-discipline, deep concentration and wisdom. With so many hours devoted to cultivation, we will naturally develop a serene mind in

just a few year's time.

Sutras flow from the pure and quiet mind of the Buddha. When we have developed a mind as pure and quiet, we will understand all we read in the sutra. The reason why the sutra is so hard to understand now is that our minds are filled with wandering thoughts. How can this mind be in harmony with one that is pure and quiet? This is why we do not understand the Buddha's words. So, if we want to learn from a good teacher, we need to trust and believe that their methods are proper and correct.

Just chose one sutra without being distracted by any others. If we chose to follow the Pure Land School, we recite and study the Infinite Life Sutra. If we choose to follow the Tiantai School we recite and study the Lotus Sutra. If we choose to follow the Flower Adornment School we recite and study the Flower Adornment Sutra. When choosing a school follow its principles and delve deeply into the sutra for five years. In other words sever all afflictions and try to develop a pure and quiet heart. This is the first step in learning Buddhism.

Frankly speaking, five years of learning and culti vating were enough for a practitioner to attain a pure mind in the past, because their minds were not as polluted as ours now are. In the past, children

would remain innocent until around ten years of age. Then they would begin to be aware of differences between right and wrong, self and others. They would begin to develop such characteristics as greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance. Look at today's children. They start showing greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance when they are only a few years old! Where do they learn these things? From television. They are exposed to television every day. They naturally become polluted. They do not have the happy innocent childhood their parents had. How unfortunate they are!

I was born and grew up in the countryside and was neither sensible nor knowing of the world until I was thirteen. True Happiness is to remain innocent as long as possible in childhood and to not be aware of any of the suffering in the world. All I knew was how to play. Once we loose our childhood innocence, we are no longer happy. For then, we have to be constantly aware of others. So, I say that modern people are less fortunate than their predecessors are.

Once we have developed a pure and quiet mind and have attained wisdom, then we can begin to broaden our knowledge. We can see, hear and learn of anything that we are interested in, for now

we have attained wisdom and will not be affected by our surroundings. Since we have self-control, the more we see and hear the wiser we will become and the greater our strength from deep concentration will be. How are deep concentration and wisdom increased? Remaining unmoved by surroundings will enhance deep concentration. Developing a clear and understanding mind will enhance wisdom. Then we can learn from other schools to further enhance our deep concentration and wisdom. First, we practice self-discipline, concentration and wisdom to attain our original wisdom. Then we can learn extensively to perfect our acquired wisdom. This is the way of learning from ancient times.

The Buddha told us in the Great Prajna Sutra, "Innocent intuitive wisdom knows all". So, we must cultivate "innocence" first. The five-year method of practicing self-discipline results in our remaining innocent of the happenings in the world. When we are again in contact with the world, we will be aware of "Knowing all". This is the proper sequence and method to learn and practice Buddhism.

Ancient patriarchs not only abided by the rules set by Buddha Shakyamuni but also took Confucianism as the basis for their learning and practice. Chinese Buddhism has abandoned Theravada Bud-

dhism in place of Confucius teachings. Chinese Buddhists as the basis for learning Buddhism adopted the five virtues of Confucius of gentleness, kindness, respectfulness, thriftiness and humility. From this foundation, they developed the Three Conditions, the Six Principles of Harmony, the Three Learnings, the Six Paramitas and the Ten Great Vows. All the schools of Mahayana Buddhism adopted this framework of learning and teaching. In other words, we can accomplish our learning and cultivation in any school as long as we follow these principles and methods. So, we can say that taking the Five Virtues and Six Harmonies is the basis and a unique characteristic of Chinese Buddhism.

There was another advanced method of teaching and learning in Buddhism; continuing education for teachers. It was not until recently that this method again came into use. When he was in this world, the Buddha had many students. Some stayed with him because they had not finished their study and thus had not yet become independent. But others had reached some achievement. The latter were Bodhisattvas, who were responsible for spreading Buddhism. They went to different locations, set up way places and taught on behalf of the Buddha. Then they would return to where the Bud-

dha currently was for a three months summer retreat for continuing education. This is similar to today's summer vacation when the students are out of school but the teachers cannot rest for they need to receive further training. So, the Bodhisattvas went back to be with the Buddha for a summer retreat. They listened to his teaching and thus were able to increase their concentration, wisdom and virtues. They also discussed difficulties they had encountered in their teaching and tried to find the solutions. They learned from each other in seeking self-improvement. This system of continuing education has been infrequently seen in Chinese history.

It is advisable that way places and Buddhist societies conduct summer and winter retreats of Buddha name recitation and Zen meditation, seminars, etc. for short-term training. This is very effective and people are able to accept this idea of short-term continuing education. If we directly tell them that it is for severing afflictions; cultivating self-discipline, deep concentration and wisdom; and transcending the cycle of birth and death, only a few people can accept this concept or be interested.

Today, people differ in their concept of Buddhist education from those in the past. They want to learn more at the beginning of their study, not knowing

that their method will limit their accomplishment whereas following the traditional method in practicing Buddhism can result in infinite benefits. In the past many people have benefited from this traditional method and achieved in their cultivation and attained Buddhahood. However, at best, the present methods can only help us to get a doctorate of Buddhism, fame and wealth. But frankly speaking, it will not be easy for us to sever afflictions or transcend the cycle of birth and death. We should consider this very carefully.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE ARTISTIC ASPECTS OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION

The Earliest System of Continuing Education

Buddha Shakyamuni gave lectures in many places, as did Confucius. In India, the Buddha and his students were invited by different groups to give talks. They would lecture in those areas for a while but did not remain permanently. As most of the Buddha's twelve thousand and fifty students would follow him, it would have been very difficult for one place to support all of them. Only after Buddhism was introduced into China did Buddhist monks and nuns take up permanent residence in what was similar to a Buddhist educational institution. This came about because the introduction of Buddhism into China was supported and financed by the emperor. In India, people respected ascetics who traveled holding an alms bowl and therefore supplied them with offerings.

In China, however, people would have regarded this tradition as begging. Since the emperor who respected them as teachers had invited the monks to China, it would have been unacceptable to have them roaming the streets begging for food. There-

fore, houses were built for them to live in and people were sent by the imperial court to assist the monks so they would not have to worry about their livelihood. By the Tang Dynasty, the system of Buddhist universities had developed. Masters Baizhang and Mazu were the initiators of these institutions. Master Mazu was the Eighth Patriarch of the Zen School and the third generation student of Master Hui-Neng, the sixth Patriarch of the Zen School. There is a Chinese saying that "Master Mazu built the university and Master Baizhang set up the rules".

What is this Buddhist University? It was the systemization of Buddhist teaching; the next step after what had been the verbal passing of teachings from a teacher to private students. After Master Mazu, the idea of the university continued to grow. This educational system was the special feature of Chinese Buddhism. The textbooks, lectures and teaching methods all attained the highest level of artistry as can be seen in the writing, music, images, architecture, offering implements, etc. Today, however, many of these perfect teachings are lost to us

The Art of Buddhism

Today, the quality of Buddhist music has dete-

riorated. We are short of talented people, not only Buddhist artists with creative talents. Therefore, A Buddhist artist has to be profoundly learned for only then can he or she truly teach others and convey truth, goodness, beauty and wisdom. Ancient masters with high spiritual achievements composed Buddhist musical lyrics, but because the minds of today's people who chant them are not pure, their expression of them is also not pure. Spiritually, they have yet to achieve a state of awakening and are thus unable to move us. The artistic decline is caused by the lack of talented practitioners, it does not mean that Buddhism lacks artistic substance.

Anyone who has been to China and visited the Dunhuang murals or the Yungang grottoes, or the stone sutra texts found in Fangshan County, Beijing, knows how magnificent Chinese Buddhist artworks can be. The stone sutras were found in the years after the Cultural Revolution and are more extensive than the Great Buddhist Canon. Some of the sutras were translated at a later time than those in the Great Buddhist Canon. Fortunately, they survived in the Fangshan site. The stone slabs are carved on both sides with each beautiful character the size of a thumb. The entire project took four hundred years to complete, equal in scale to the building of the Great

Wall. This recently discovered collection includes tens of thousands of stone slabs stored in seven caves. At present, only two of the caves are open to the public. We were filled with awe and admiration when we saw these stone sutras and could not help but admire our ancestors for having preserved such a legacy for us.

Today, schools and museums are separated. However, the system of Buddhist universities is similar to a combination of school and museum, for the art forms are educational, not just artistic. They exhibit inspiration and wisdom not discernable by average people. For example, when people see the many images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, they conclude that Buddhists worship many deities and therefore Buddhism is a religion and one of low standards at that.

Most people believe that an advanced religion worships only one god. They do not understand that Buddhism is not a religion, that we do not worship the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas but rather we regard them as teaching aids, which help us to understand the different methods of cultivation. One single image or method is insufficient to represent all phenomena in our world, so Buddhism uses many kinds of artistic works to represent them. Once we

have understood the educational significance of Buddhist artistry, we will naturally give rise to admiration and appreciation.

All Buddhas symbolize our virtuous nature. All Bodhisattvas and Arhats symbolize the virtue of practice. Without the virtue of practice, the innate virtuous nature cannot be revealed. This complementary relationship is why the Buddha Table includes both Buddha and Bodhisattva images. The Buddhas represent original nature and the Bodhisattvas represent the application of this nature. This original nature is empty, as it has no set form. All creations or form arise from this original nature and once there is form, there is application. The Buddha represents the original nature and the Bodhisattvas represent form and application. This is why in the Flower Adornment Sutra, the Buddha does not comment on the teachings, for the original nature that is empty has nothing to say. But the Bodhisattvas do have something to say since they apply the principles. Not only is the original nature unexplained but also no thoughts arises from it. The saying that "Whenever I open my mouth I blunder; whenever I have an idea I am wrong." is said in terms of original nature represented by one Buddha. Why are there two Bodhisattvas to represent application? The infinite and innumerable

form and application are divided into two categories; wisdom and practice or understanding and behavior. Practice corresponds with understanding. Understanding is the principle and practice is the application.

When we see the image of Buddha Shakyamuni, usually Ananda and Kasyapa, two great Arhats are on either side of him. Buddha Shakyamuni represents our original nature. Ananda, who is foremost in hearing, represents understanding and wisdom. Kasyapa, who is foremost in asceticism, represents practice. We may also see Buddha Vairocana, the wisdom body of Buddha Shakyamuni, with Manjushri Bodhisattva and Universal Worthy Bodhisattva on either side of him. Manjushri Bodhisattva represents understanding; Universal Worthy Bodhisattva represents practice.

Pure Land Buddhism regards Buddha Amitabha as the original nature with Guan Yin Bodhisattva representing compassion and practice, and Great Strength Bodhisattva representing wisdom and understanding. Due to these profound meanings, there cannot be two or more Buddhas and three or more Bodhisattvas.

Each Buddha represents a part of the virtuous nature. Every part of it is perfect so "One is all, all is

one". Each name illustrates the virtues. For example, "Shakya" means kindness, teaching us that we need to treat others with kindness and compassion. "Muni" means stillness and purity. The whole meaning of Shakyamuni teaches us to behave toward others with kindness and compassion, to strive for purity of mind for ourselves. This is the meaning of Shakyamuni and is innate to our original nature. Amituofo is a Sanskrit transliteration. "Amituo" means infinite. "Fo" means Buddha. What is infinite? Everything, infinite wisdom, ability, long life, etc. But of all infinities, infinite life is the most important for without it all infinities are useless. With it, we can enjoy all other infinities.

How can we gain these infinities? Infinity is none other than our self-nature, our original true nature. The Sixth Patriarch of Zen, Master Hui-Neng said, "Self-nature is innate; from self-nature arises all phenomena in the universe". In other words, it means infinity. What method do we use to obtain this infinity? We practice the teachings of Guan Yin Bodhisattva and Great Strength Bodhisattva. The former teaches us to be compassionate; the latter teaches us the single-minded concentration of Buddha Amitabha. Great Strength Bodhisattva taught us "Concentrate solely on Buddha Amitabha, without

ceasing, without intermingling with other methods, and in this way we will surely attain wisdom and enlightenment".

Adding to this is the compassionate way of Guan Yin Bodhisattva. Behaving towards others with compassion and chanting only "Namo Amituofo" will enable us to enjoy infinite life. In this way we will develop our virtuous nature and uncover our infinite merits and virtues. Thus, when we pay respect to the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, we need to understand that each is representative of a way of cultivation and of the truth of the universe.

The Hall of Heavenly Guardians

Buddhist architecture is also an artistic expression. From the exterior, the main cultivation hall 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.

Upon entering a way place, we first see the Hall

of Heavenly Guardians. In the center of the hall is Maitreya Bodhisattva. To his left and right are the four Heavenly Guardians or Dharma Protectors. Maitreya Bodhisattva, known as the "Happy Buddha" in the west, is represented by the image of the historical monk Bu-Dai, a manifestation of Maitreya Bodhisattva. Maitreya Bodhisattva has a big smile that conveys "Want to learn Buddhism? Be happy and greet everyone with a smile. Do not constantly lose your temper or else you cannot learn Buddhism". This Bodhisattva also has a huge belly representing great broad-mindedness and equality of mind, teaching us to treat everything and everyone with generosity, patience and serenity. Only by emulating such qualities can we learn and practice Buddhism. Therefore, Maitreya Bodhisattva sits facing the door to tell all who enter, "only those who can accomplish this are eligible to learn Buddhism".

Standing beside Maitreya Bodhisattva 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 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. How do we fulfill this responsibility? If each of us performs our duties well, fulfilling our obligations, we support each other and ourselves as well. In this way, society will be harmonious and the country will be prosperous and powerful.

The Southern Dharma Protector symbolizes progress and teaches us diligence. It is not enough to just meet our responsibilities. We need to make progress with each passing day for no progress means we regress. He emphasizes the importance of constantly cultivating and advancing our virtue, conduct, wisdom and ability, and to improve performance in our duties and our standard of living. From this, we can see that Buddhism is progressive, always leading the times.

The Western Dharma Protector symbolizes comprehensive vision and knowledge gained through exposure to the world. He represents the need to open our eyes to observe nature and humanity, to refine what we see and learn, and to distinguish good from ill. The Northern Dharma Protector 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". Reading is the means for accomplishing the fundamental knowledge. Traveling ten thousand miles is to learn from observation. Through travel we see advantages of others and learn from them.

We also see their shortcomings, which can in turn serve as a warning to us so that we constantly improve ourselves. In this way, we can build a prosperous society and a safe country. In doing so, we safeguard the Dharma. So, the images of the Bodhisattvas and Dharma Protectors remind us to be diligent in the pursuit of our goals and responsibilities. So, we can see that Buddhism is neither a religion nor superstition.

The Four Dharma Protectors hold various objects to symbolize different aspects of the Dharma. The Eastern Dharma Protector of Managing the Nation holds a lute, which symbolizes the principle that we need to refrain from acting with undue haste but should keep to the middle path. It is like playing a lute, if the strings are too loose, it will not play. If they are too tight, they will break. We need to be responsible in our duties and do things in a proper, bal-

anced way.

The Southern Dharma Protector of Growth holds the sword of wisdom that cuts away all troubles and worries. The Western Dharma Protector holds a dragon or snake that is twining around him. The dragon or snake symbolizes change. Today, everything is constantly changing, only when we can see the truth will we be able to interact with ease and serenity. The Northern Dharma Protector holds an umbrella symbolizing protecting us from all the pollution that is around us. While learning, we need to safeguard our pure mind and quiet heart from becoming polluted. Furthermore, we need to understand the true reality of life and the universe, to have the wisdom and ability to properly interact with all people, matters and objects.

All of this can be learned from visiting the Hall of Heavenly Guardians. If we regard the Protectors as deities with magical powers who will protect us if we burn incense, prostrate and offer flowers and fruit praying for protection and safety we will be sadly mistaken. 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, vir-

tuous instead of deviated, pure instead of polluted. These are the three principles of Buddhist teaching and practice.

Therefore, everything in a way place serves as a teaching aid. Even the offerings are educational. A container of water symbolizes the Dharma. The water is clean symbolizing that our minds need to be as pure as the water. It is calm without a single ripple, symbolizing the tranquility in our hearts. It is to have purity and equality of mind. Flowers symbolize the "cause" as the blossoming of flowers results in the bearing of fruit. Flowers symbolize the Six Paramitas. Fruits are not offered to the Buddha or Bodhisattvas to eat. They remind us that if we want the sweet fruit or the good result, we must cultivate and accumulate good deeds, the cause. Thus, everything we see in the way place is a teaching aid. The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas neither smell nor eat, they want for nothing.

We also see lamps, which symbolize wisdom and brightness; incense sticks, which symbolize self-discipline and deep concentration. You will not see anything in the cultivation and lecture halls that do not symbolize some teaching. However, it is a sad loss that many Buddhists are totally ignorant of the educational significance of these objects. They do

not know why they burn the incense or why they make offerings to the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Their belief is actually superstition. Some people criticize Buddhists being superstitious. These critics are right. Too many Buddhists are confused about Buddhism.

We need to be clear on what we are learning and explain this to the skeptics and critics, then I believe they will also want to learn. I have introduced Buddhism to people in China in this manner. After hearing my explanation, they said they had been ignorant of such a good thing and wished to learn more.

In conclusion, it is the genuine wisdom and infinite enlightenment in Buddhism that helps all sentient beings obtain true benefits and happiness. The Buddha teaches all beings with his boundless, compassionate heart. Throughout history Buddhist practitioners, whether they be of the Esoteric, Zen or any other School, have made great achievements following these principles and methods. Today, however, people know very little of the genuine principles and methods, so few have any real achievements.

In our Dharma-Ending Age, people have overwhelming obstacles from their accumulated karma.

Under these circumstances, the Buddha Name Recitation Method is most effective due to its simplicity and expediency. It neither takes a long time nor requires special rituals. Anyone can practice it any time, any place. This is why so many people have achieved attainment. Taiwan is neither large in population nor size, but in the last forty years, by my most conservative estimate, at least five hundred people have attained birth into the Pure Land to become a Buddha in one lifetime.

To succeed, we accord with teachings in the five Pure Land sutras and one commentary, generate the Bodhi-mind and concentrate on mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha. The Awakening of Faith Sastra stated that, "enlightenment is innate, delusion is not". Therefore, we definitely can uncover our innate Buddha nature and proper viewpoints. We definitely can discard what is not innate, our delusion, deviated viewpoints and impurities. Thus, we recite sincerely "Amituofo" to rid ourselves of our negative karmas and habits, to live simply and to practice diligently to attain the Buddha Name Chanting Samadhi. Then, finally we will attain freedom in body and mind, and understand the true reality.

We are free to go whenever we wish. If we choose to remain here for a longer time, that's all

right. Since so many have achieved, why can't we? We have not sincerely chanted long enough. How long is long enough? According to ancient records, many have achieved after three years. After that, we no longer have any fears. We will feel perfectly safe and our minds will be at ease. If the Third World War were to start today and a nuclear bomb was to explode, we would simply say that it was time to go to the Pure Land. No pain, no fear, true freedom. Then, this is what the Infinite Life Sutra stated of "the true benefit given to all sentient beings".

Adopt whatever teachings and practices are beneficial and effective. There is only one ultimate goal for us; benefiting all sentient beings, helping them free themselves from delusions and sufferings, and enabling them to attain happiness and enlightenment. If badgering or battering works, use it. If gentleness works use it. But be aware that falsehoods, attachments, emotions and delusions have nothing to do with Buddhism or achieving our goal. I hope everyone will attain the goal of freedom from delusion, attachment and suffering, to attain happiness, tranquility and the perfect complete enlightenment.

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 Buddha Amitabha's name 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 fulfillment of our wish to reach the Western Pure Land of Infinite Life and Infinite Light. We hope everyone will practice accordingly.

Namo Amituofo!

GLOSSARY

Aeon. 1,334,000,000 years. Often expressed as the time it would take for a mountain of solid rock of ten cubic leagues to wear down if the tip of a heavenly maiden's delicate tunic brushed against it every hundred years. A fantastically long period of time.

Affliction. Condition or cause of pain, distress and suffering which disturbs the body and mind.

Alaya Consciousness. (Sanskrit or Skrt). Our store consciousness, the thought database from all our past and present lives, good or bad.

Amitabha. The name of the Buddha of the Western Pure Land, primarily meaning Infinite Life and Light. Called Amituofo in Chinese.

Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi (Skrt). Highest, proper and complete enlightenment.

Arhat (Skrt). One who has reached self-realization, a state in which one possesses no erroneous perceptions, views, speech or behavior.

Asuras. Quarrelsome, half-gods.

Attachments. Fixed to certain ideas or objects.

Bodhi mind (Skrt). The great compassionate and sincere mind, with every thought to attain complete self-realization for self and other.

Bodhisattva (Skrt). One who helps others to reach

realization after achieving their own.

Buddha (Skrt). One who has reached perfection in both self-realization and helping others to reach realization.

Delusion. False beliefs, wrong views.

Deva. Heavenly Beings or gods

Dharma (Skrt). 1) The teachings of the Buddha (generally capitalized in English); 2) Things, events, phenomena, everything; 3) Duty, law, doctrine.

Dharma Ending Age. The Dharma Perfect Age began with Buddha Shakyamuni's demise and lasted five hundred years, during which Enlightenment was often attained. The Dharma Semblance Age began after that and lasted one thousand years, during which Enlightenment was seldom attained. The Dharma Ending Age that we are now in began after that and will last for ten thousand years during which Enlightenment will rarely be attained.

Dusts. Metaphor for all the mundane things that can cloud our self-nature.

Eight Afflictions. Absence of embarrassment and shamefulness, and the presence of jealously, stinginess, misdeeds, drowsiness, sleep and agitation.

Eight Sufferings. As human beings, we undergo the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. We do not attain what we seek, suffer hardships, are

parted from our loved ones and find ourselves in the presence of those whom we resent or even hate.

Eighth Ground Bodhisattva. There are ten levels or grounds of a Bodhisattva's enlightenment, which summarize the most important steps in a Bodhisattva's path right before attaining Buddhahood. Some say it is at this level that Bodhisattvas reach the stage of Non-regression, the level at which they will never retreat from the Bodhisattva-path.

Five Deadly Offenses. Murdering one's own father, murdering one's own mother, causing a Buddha to bleed, killing a Bodhisattva or an Arhat and disrupting the unity of the Sangha.

Five Desires. Wealth, lust, fame, food-drink, and sleep.

Five Guidelines. Following: 1) The Three Conditions; 2) The Principles of Harmony; 3) The Three Learnings; 4) The Six Paramitas or Principles and 5) Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Ten Great Vows.

Five Pure Land Sutras and One Sastra. (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 Perfect Com-

plete Realization of Great Strength Bodhisattva through Buddha Name Recitation" from the Surangama Sutra and (6) Vasubandhu Bodhisattva's Report on the Way to Reaching the Pure Land.

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.

Good Fortune. Happiness, intelligence, wellbeing, prosperity, etc. The great benefits of the human and celestial realms; therefore, they are temporary and subject to birth and death.

Good roots. Good qualities or seeds sowed by a good life to be reaped later.

Hungry Ghost. One of the three lower realms. Hungry ghosts wander in a limbo-like state in which they can find no satisfaction for their desires, especially but not exclusively, for their hunger or thirst. One is reborn here if he or she has extreme greed.

Karma (Skrt). Law of Cause and Effect, results from thought, speech and behavior.

Karmic Result. The natural reward or retribution brought about by the Law of Cause and Effect (Karma).

Mahayana (Skrt). One of the two major branches of Buddhism. Bodhisattva path of helping all sentient beings to attain universal liberation.

Merits and Virtues. To do good things without expectation of reward, without discrimination, attachment or wandering thoughts.

Mindfulness of Buddha. Initially the mind remembers the Buddha and does not forget. After further cultivation, one constantly contemplates the Buddha.

Nine Realms. All ten realms minus the Buddha realm.

Non-regression. One who will never retreat from the Bodhisattva-path, some say it is not reached until the eighth of the ten grounds of a Bodhisattva.

Phenomena. Things, events, happenings, everything in the entire universe.

Prajna-Wisdom (Skrt). Intuitive wisdom

Pratyekabuddha (Skrt). One who attains his enlightenment alone, independent of a teacher, with the objective of attaining Nirvana for him/herself.

Precepts. Rules set up by Buddha Shakyamuni to guide his students from erroneous thoughts, speech and behavior.

Pure Land. See Western Pure Land.

Pure Mind or Purity of Mind. The mind without discrimination or attachments.

Retribution. Karmic punishment from erroneous

thought, speech or action.

Saha world (Skrt). Refers to our solar system, filled with suffering and affiictions, yet gladly endured by its inhabitants.

Samadhi (Skrt). Proper enjoyment. Usually denotes the particular final stage of pure concentration and contemplation. There are many degrees and types of Samadhi.

Sangha (Skrt). Group of four or more peoples who properly practice the Buddha's teaching together, especially The Six Principles of Harmony.

Sanskrit (Skrt). Language of ancient India.

Sastra (Skrt). Commentary on sutras primarily by Bodhisattvas.

Self-Nature. Our original, true self that we still have, but is currently covered by deluded thoughts.

Sentient being. A living being that is self-aware and that can experience feeling or sensation.

Sharira (Skrt). Relics that remain after cremation indicating the person had attained some degree of purity of body and mind.

Six Paramitas or Principles. Giving, self-discipline, patience, diligence, deep concentration and wisdom.

Six Principles of Harmony. 1) Share the same viewpoints or goals. 2) Observe the same precepts. 3) Live and practice together harmoniously. 4) Not

quarrel. 5) Experience the inner peace and happiness from practicing together harmoniously. 6) Share benefits harmoniously.

Six Realms. Three upper realms are heavens, asuras and humans. Three lower realms are animals, hungry ghosts and hells.

Six Senses. Sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and thought.

Six Sense Objects. Form, sound, scent, taste, texture and thought.

Six Sense Organs. Eyes, ears, nose mouth, body and mind.

Sutra (Skrt). Teaching by the Buddha, initially given verbally, later compiled and written down by the Buddha's students.

Ten Directions. North, Northeast, East, Southeast, South, Southwest, West, Northwest, above and below.

Ten Good Conducts. No killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, abusive language, bearing tales, seductive words, greed, anger or ignorance.

Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva 1) Pay respect to all Buddhas. 2) Praise "Thus Come One." 3) Make offerings extensively. 4) Repent of Karmic obstacles. 5) Be joyful over others meritorious deeds. 6) Appeal to the Buddha to turn the Dharma

wheel. 7) Request the Buddha to reside in this world. 8) Constantly be a diligent follower of the Buddha's teaching. 9) Accord with all sentient beings. 10) Dedicate all merits.

Ten Realms. Six realms plus those of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas and Sound-hearers.

Three Conditions. The First Condition includes: Being filial to one's parents, Being respectful to one's teachers and elders, Being compassionate and not killing any living beings and Following the Ten Good Conducts. The Second Condition includes: Taking the Three Refuges, Abiding by the precepts, laws and customs, and Conducting oneself in a proper and dignified manner. The Third Condition includes: Generating the Bodhi mind, Deeply believing in the Law of Cause and Effect, Reciting and upholding Mahayana sutras and Encouraging others to advance on the path to Enlightenment.

Three Learnings. Self-discipline, deep concentration and wisdom.

Three Poisons. Greed, anger and ignorance.

Three Refuges. We take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. 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.

Transliteration. To represent (letters or words) in the corresponding characters of another alphabet, so the original sound is retained.

Virtues. See **Merits**.

Way Place. Usually called a temple, a place where Buddhist practitioners come to practice.

Western Pure Land. World created by Buddha Amitabha. An ideal place of cultivation, those who are born there are no longer subject to reincarnation.

PLACES TO CONTACT

Amitabha Buddhist Society (Singapore)
No. 2 Lorong 35 Geylang,
Singapore, 387934
Tel: (65) 744-7444
Fax: (65) 744-4774
Website:http://www.amtb.org.sg

Amitabha Buddhist Association of Queensland
11 Toona Place
Calamvale, Brisbane
Queensland 4116, Australia
Tel: (07) 3273-1693
Fax: (07) 3272-0677

Dallas Buddhist Association
515 Apollo Road
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Tel:972.234.4401
Fax: 972.234.8342
Website:http://www.amtb-dba.org

The Pure Land Learning Center

21730 Stevens Creek Blvd. #202

Cupertino, CA USA

Tel: 408.255.5258

The Singapore Buddhist Lodge

17-19 Kim Yam Road

Singapore, 239329

Tel: (65) 737-2630

Fax: (65) 737-0877

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"Wherever the Buddha's teachings

have flourished, either in cities or

countrysides, people would gain inconceivable

benefits.. The land and people would be enveloped

in peace. The sun and moon would shine clear and

bright. Wind and rain would appear accordingly

and there would be no disasters. Nations

would be prosperous

and there would be no use for soldiers or weapons.

People would abide by morality and accord with

laws. They would be courteous and humble, and

everyone would be content without injustices. There

would be no thefts or violence. The strong would not

dominate the weak and everyone would get

their fair share."

The Teachings Of Great Master Yin Guang

Whether one is a layperson or has left the home-life, one should respect elders and be harmonious to those surrounding him. One should endure what others cannot, and practice what others cannot achieve. One should take others' difficulties unto oneself and help them succeed in their undertakings. While sitting quietly, one should often reflect upon one's own faults, and when chatting with friends, one should not discuss the rights and wrongs of others. In every action one makes, whether dressing or eating, from dawn to dusk and dusk till dawn, one should not cease to recite the AMITABHA Buddha's name. Aside from Buddha recitation, whether reciting quietly or silently, one should not give rise to other improper thoughts. If wandering thoughts appear, one should immediately dismiss them. Constantly maintain a humble and repentful heart; even if one has upheld true cultivation, one should still feel one's practice is shallow and never boast. One should mind one's own business and not the business of others. Only look after the good examples of others instead of bad ones. One should see oneself as mundane and everyone else as Bodhisattvas. If one can cultivate according to these teachings, one is sure to reach the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Homage to Amitabha! Amitabha!

With bad advisors forever left behind,
From paths of evil he departs for eternity,
Soon to see the Buddha of Limitless Light
And perfect Samantabhadra's Supreme Vows.

The supreme and endless blessings
of Samantabhadra's deeds,
I now universally transfer.
May every living being, drowning and adrift,
Soon return to the Pure Land of
Limitless Light!

~The Vows of Samantabhadra~

I vow that when my life approaches its end,
All obstructions will be swept away;
I will see Amitabha Buddha,
And be born in His Western Pure Land of
Ultimate Bliss and Peace.

When reborn in the Western Pure Land,
I will perfect and completely fulfill
Without exception these Great Vows,
To delight and benefit all beings.

~The Vows of Samantabhadra
Avatamsaka Sutra~

DEDICATION OF MERIT

May the merit and virtue
accrued from this work
adorn Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land,
repay the four great kindnesses above,
and relieve the suffering of
those on the three paths below.

May those who see or hear of these efforts
generate Bodhi-mind,
spend their lives devoted to the Buddha Dharma,
and finally be reborn together in
the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Homage to Amita Buddha!

NAMO AMITABHA

南無阿彌陀佛

財團法人佛陀教育基金會 印贈
台北市杭州南路一段五十五號十一樓
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The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation
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Tel: 886-2-23951198 , Fax: 886-2-23913415
Email: overseas@budaedu.org.tw
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we request that it be treated with respect.
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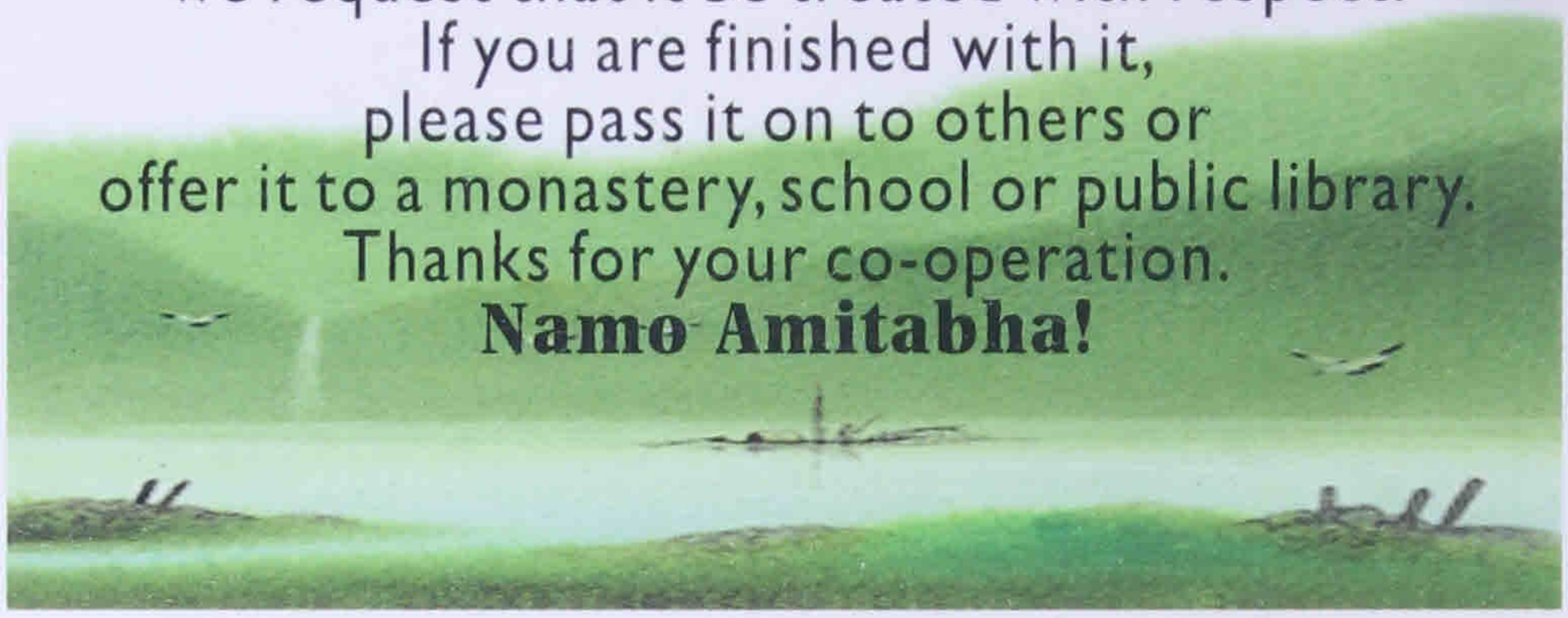
Namo Amitabha!



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