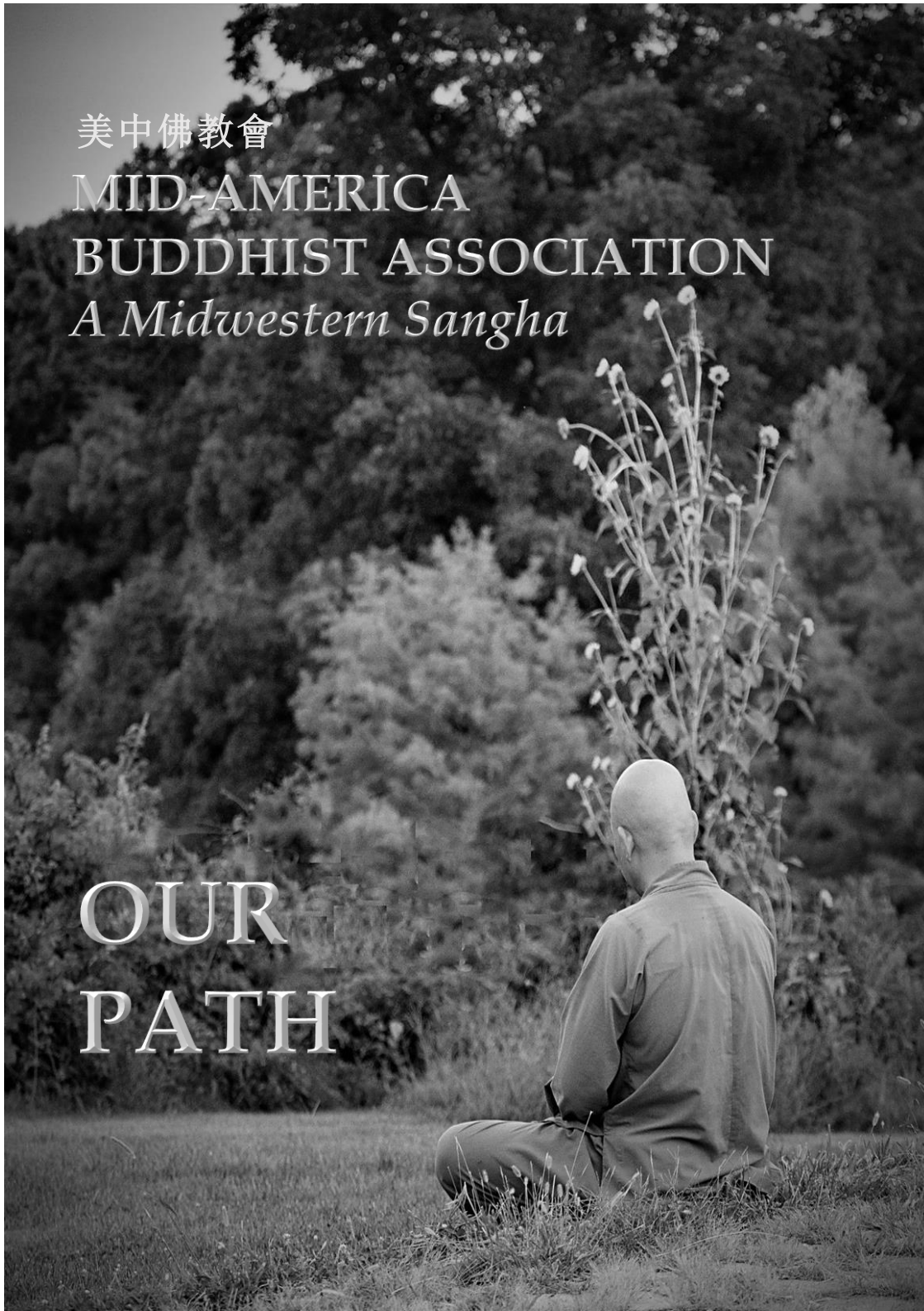
美中佛教會
MID-AMERICA
BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION
A Midwestern Sangha
OUR
PATH

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MID-AMERICA
BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION

A Midwestern Sangha

Our Path

299 Heger Lane, Augusta, MO 63332

www.maba-usa.org

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Preface

Into all our lives, change comes. Impermanence is learned, through difficulty or ease. Understanding, of ourselves and others, manifests, arises. To those who seek, answers are found. Encouraged, we find the path to our authentic selves.

The coming together of people along the way assures us that we are not alone, even when our path is not lit. A chance meeting can make all the difference in becoming the person we know in our hearts. We stumble, and a hand gently guides us. We are grateful, and continue, gladdened by the knowledge. More confident and serene, we see that we are connected to all things: we are one.

This is sangha. The third jewel in the Triple Gem.

The Buddha told Ánanda, "Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life." (SN 45.2) It is true not only for the monastic sangha, but for the lay sangha as well. To develop a strong spiritual practice, one needs the benefit of both monastics and lay people. MABA was borne out of a desire to bring the Dharma to St. Louis, where Buddhists could practice under the guidance of monastics. To see first-hand, how living a life dedicated to self-improvement, meditation, and service to benefit all beings, is both joyful and meaningfully liberating. All are welcome.

With mettā and karuṇā for all beings,

~ Xiǎnhuān Francesca Williams, Editor
Augusta, MO
2018

Pink lotus flower blooming in MABA's lake

Message from Master Jìrú

Dear all lay Buddhists:

Wishing you a peaceful holiday season and an auspicious New Year.

First of all, I welcome you to contact MABA at any time, make a trip to the Midwest region, to visit and stay with us at the monastery, to interact with us, as well as to learn some Buddhist teachings.

You are invited to join us on the weekend of March 24th and 25th, 2018, when MABA will hold an opening ceremony for our new building. We will take the opportunity to look back on our long history of establishing the monastery with a multimedia presentation, and to discuss our future (please check our website: www.maba-usa.org for next year's events). Your participation and early registration, together with your family and friends, is encouraged.

After 23 years of groundbreaking, MABA is now equipped with facilities that can accommodate 30–50 people. In comparison to the limited conveniences in the past, when only local students could come to study and practice, we now have the facilities which will allow us to better organize Buddhist educational programs, including serving out-of-state students who would like to come, practice, and deepen their understanding of the Dharma.

I am deeply grateful for the generous and kindhearted contributions from the many Buddhist disciples in different places. All the manpower, material, and spiritual supports are extremely important to us, which continuously motivate us to work perseveringly and fearlessly on developing and sowing the Dharma seeds in the ground of the agricultural states in the Midwest region, thus allowing the seedlings of Bodhi to root in this new cultural land.

Regarding the future events at MABA, we have begun work on founding the "Right Mindfulness Training Academy," which is a new organization affiliated with MABA's Youth Buddhist Educational Foundation. With the hope that soon, the chief members of MABA will be able to get back to their study and practice of the Dharma, focusing on their original duty of "guiding The Way, imparting the Teaching, and resolving questions."

We aim to, and will now be able to, extend the Buddhist education and training on loving-kindness and purification to universities, organizations, cultural circles, and out to the international communities, so that the light of Buddha is not limited to the Buddhist circle. Furthermore, we aspire to keep abreast of the leading-edge trends, connecting and interacting with talented individuals, working with them in a mutually beneficial way. Thus, the short-term goal of MABA is not only to benefit the local region, but also to reach out internationally and stay with the vanguard of the era. The launch and fulfilment of these goals require financial, manpower, technical, and intellectual assistance from our community. We look forward to welcoming you as a member of MABA's sangha, and dedicate ourselves to Buddhism.

For more than twenty years we have been working diligently, steadfastly living with and faithfully practicing the Teachings, always fully transparent and without subterfuge. We have accomplished our first goal. To realize our next goal over the coming ten years – our great aspiration of exemplifying the Buddha by identifying, training, and nurturing talented people who, with the goodness of His Teachings, will lead others worldwide – greatly need your on-going financial support.

With sincere appreciation, I wish you to be happy, well, and peaceful.

President, MABA
Jìrú Bhikkhu
10.29.2017

各位居士們：

聖誕節日平安，新年吉祥。

首先，歡迎諸位居士隨時聯絡本會，前來中部旅遊、參訪並在道場裡住宿，在我們寺裡交流、學些佛教的學養。

本會將於明年三月廿四至廿五之兩週日，舉辦新屋啟用典禮，並以多媒體的呈現方式來回顧過去創道場的經歷和討論展望未來的計劃（關於明年的活動，請上我們的網址 www.maba-usa.org 查詢），歡迎您及親友們提前報名參加。

美中佛教會歷經了廿三年的開拓，現在已經具備提供卅至五十人住宿條件的規模，可以接待外來學眾聞法、修行，以深入佛法。比對以往只能讓本區域學眾修學佛法的便利，明年我們有更大的空間來辦好佛教的工作了。

最令我感恩的是，各地佛弟子們的種種善心捐款。人力、物力、心力的協助都極為重要，各位激發著我們艱苦奮鬥，不屈不饒的開荒、播佛種子於中部的幾個農業州，使菩提樹苗根植在本土文化的新土壤裡。

對於美中佛教會未來的活動，我們正在著手申辦「僧伽醫護基金」以及一個附屬於本會青年教育基金的「正念培訓學院」。希望本會主要任責的領導們在不久的將來可以恢復到專心從事佛教的治學，做到“傳道、授業、解惑”的專業、專職上來。

我們有此志願，也有能力把佛教的關懷與淨化的教育及培訓工作，擴大到大學、文化圈子、企業及國際交流裡，使佛陀的啟示不限於佛教界，更能與時代潮流脈動及社會精英相互聯動，使彼此得益。因此，美中佛教會未來的短期目標不僅造福本地，還能走出去、跨國界，與弄潮者看齊。這些工作的推動及完善，需要經濟、人力、技能與智慧的支援。盼望您也成為我們的一員，共同為佛教作貢獻。

廿多年來，我們為了佛教的發揚，一直都踏實的依教奉行、努力工作，從來沒有怪力亂神、惑眾取寵。如今，初階段的傳教使命已完成。進一步理想的發揮很需要諸位佛弟子們於經費上的繼續支持，讓我們識才、培才、養才、用才的鴻圖大志師心佛陀，以便在未來的十年裡，我們的人才能走入主流社會及走出國門，依佛法的優勢引導時代。

僅此是荷，時安。

美中佛教會主席
釋繼如 合十
10.29.2017

Master Jìrú

ABOUT
MID-AMERICA BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION MONASTERY (MABA)

MABA was founded in 1995 and now is comprised of 76 secluded acres along the rolling hills of Augusta, Missouri. The Monastery was founded by Ven. Master Janhai, and Ven. Master Jìrú became our Abbot in 1999.

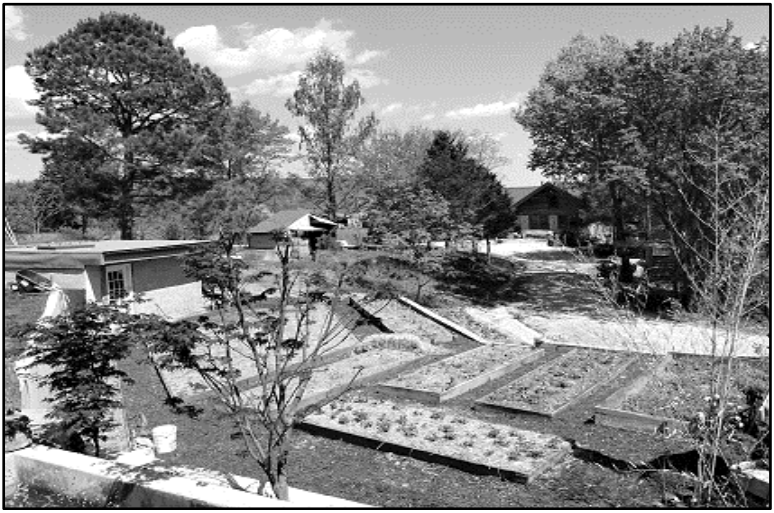
Currently, MABA is staffed by Ven. Master Jìrú, Ven. Kōngshí, Ven. Kōngyán, and Ven. Zhàozhàn. Over the years other monastics have both visited and resided at MABA. Other monastic residents have included Ven. Chimiu and Ven. Kōngzhèng, both now in Chicago, and our dear Ven. Kōnghuàn, whose passing is commemorated every Nov. 12.

All the monastery buildings at MABA (except for the original Female Residential Hall, a century-old farm house) were designed by architect, Lei-Hoo Mak (*pictured, above*), on a pro bono basis, and built by the monastics as well as volunteers.

We are deeply grateful for everyone's contributions in helping to build MABA over the years.

MABA has its own sawmill and woodworking equipment, as well as various workshop spaces. Much of the wood for the buildings has been milled at MABA from trees local to our area. And much of the rock is also from nearby, except for the carved stones of the Dìzàng Hall, which came over from China.

Ever mindful, MABA works to provide their own food: fruits, vegetables, and nuts are currently grown on the property. Future plans include the building of a greenhouse–in order to extend the growing season–which will allow MABA to become even more self-sufficient. Raised beds, canning, preserving, and composting are all part of MABA's sustainable practices.



View from Mañjuśrī Hall, overlooking MABA's new raised garden beds

We have also begun a project of caring for bees. With kindness and mindfulness, our beekeepers practice a different type of calm abiding! Bees are becoming increasingly endangered, so we endeavor to be of benefit to our local bees by providing nectar and pollen sources. They, in turn, are generous in contributing honey (a Buddhist nutriment) in exchange for our consideration.

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Monastic Sangha

Master Jìrú (Shīfù)

Born in Malaysia, Venerable Master Jìrú studied Theravada Buddhism and was ordained in that tradition in Thailand in 1980. He later studied Chinese Buddhism and became ordained in that tradition as well under the late great Buddhist Master Venerable ZhùMó in 1986. Master Jìrú has held several important teaching and administrative positions in the Malaysian Buddhist community including the Vice-Chairmanship of the Buddhist Association of Malaysia Youth and Religious Advisor to the Sabah State Liaison Committee of Malaysia where he helped establish the Sabah and Labuan Buddhist Educational Foundation. Shīfù came to the United States in 1992 to give a Dharma Talk and shortly thereafter was appointed Abbot of Great Enlightenment Temple in New York. In 1993, he became Secretary of the Buddhist Union of New York. In 1996, he became the Vice-Chairperson of the Mid-America Buddhist Association (MABA). He formed the Youth Buddhist Educational Foundation in the following year. In 1999, he became the Abbot of Mid-America Buddhist Association. In 2000, he became the Abbot of the International Buddhism Friendship Association in Chicago. In 2002, he was appointed abbot of Chuang Yen Monastery and Great Enlightenment Temple in New York. He held those positions for two years before returning full-time to MABA, where he now resides.

Master Jìrú, with Sati and Mitta

The Triangle Balance of Mindfulness

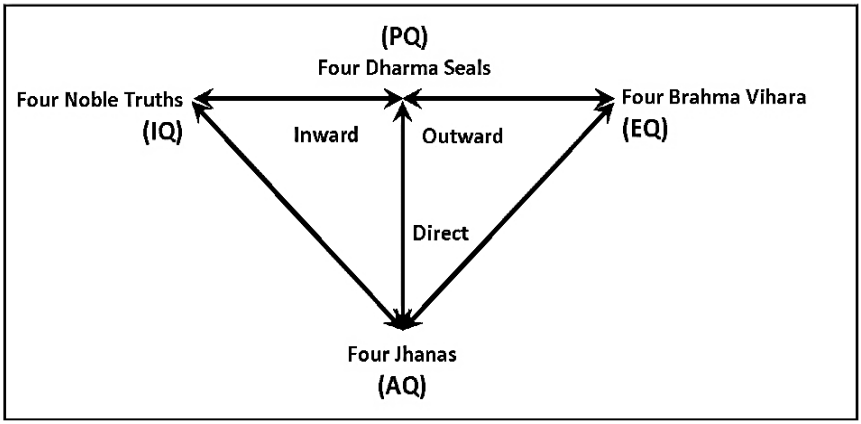
– Holistic Development of AQ, EQ, IQ, and PQ in Buddhism

Venerable Master Jìrú

2017 Vesak Day Celebration at MABA

I have learned and studied from two main Buddhist Traditions throughout my monkhood. I first learnt from the Southern Tradition in Thailand, or as we commonly call it, the Elders' Teaching (Theravada). After six years of learning and practice in Thailand, I went back to Malaysia to learn the Chinese Buddhism, or the so-called Northern Tradition, which was transmitted from the western region of Central Asia to China through the Silk Road in as early as first century, and later was propagated to Japan, Korea, and part of Vietnam. Besides these two traditions, there is another tradition which was directly transmitted from India to the regions of Bhutan, Tibet, and the hillside of Himalaya, forming the Tibetan Buddhism nowadays. These three main Buddhist Traditions are still present in this era.

This diagram suddenly conjured up in my mind when I was traveling in an airplane one day. I immediately drew it on a tissue paper before I forgot about it! The other information in the diagram was added later for my teaching purposes.



This triangle diagram is analogous to a man in a standing posture: Four Jhanas (AQ) is his feet, the base that supports the whole-body frame; his right hand is holding the Four Brahma Vihara (EQ) and his left hand is holding the Four Noble Truths (IQ). Both hands need to be in balance, and his head – the chief commander of his body – is the Four Dharma Seals (PQ). Hands and feet act and work coherently under the instructions and command from the head. Just like no living being is able to function without the head, no Buddhist practitioner is able to walk on the Right Path without the Four Dharma Seals as the guidance. Likewise, a living being is considered to be healthy and complete only if all parts of the body are properly intact. If a hand is being amputated, this hand has immediately lost its function as a hand; it is no longer be called a "hand" but simply an "anga" in Pali language, which means only "a constituent part of a body." This is true when we come to the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path as a whole, the eight parts of the Noble Eightfold Path need to be practiced holistically, in order to achieve the balance between the development of one's AQ, EQ, IQ, and PQ – in order for a man to stand firmly in balance.

This triangle diagram is composed of two smaller triangles: in the left triangle, the Four Noble Truths (IQ) is connected with the Four Jhanas (AQ) at the bottom and back to the Four Dharma Seals (PQ) in the center top. This path is the predominant practice in the Southern Tradition. AQ – Adversity Quotient – pertains to how much pressure a person is able to endure; the higher a person's stress endurance, the higher one's AQ index. High AQ can be trained and strengthened through training of the mind (mindfulness and concentration training). The more stable a mind in facing changes and distresses in life, the higher stress endurance one possesses.

Four Noble Truths (IQ) is well-taught in the Southern Tradition in Southeast Asia; it is one of the core Buddhist teachings in

Thailand, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. The first of the Four Noble Truths is "Dukkha" – stresses or dissatisfactions one encounters in the life brought by issues related to aging, illness, and death, etc. Thus, in the teaching of Four Noble Truths, it talks about various kinds of stresses, the causes of stresses, the way towards liberation from stresses, and the cessation of stresses.

The path that leads to ultimate liberation – the Noble Eightfold Path – is the topic of most concern by Buddhist practitioners. There are two levels of the Noble Eightfold Path: the mundane and the transcendent levels. The process to reach the ultimate destination varies between different beings. There were people who had accomplished it within a single lifetime. For instance, many had attained Arahatship by following this transcendent path during the Buddha's time. At the meantime, there are many who are unable to practice, or achieve nothing, because of too much clinging to the worldly concerns. Sensual desires are one of the primary obstacles on the Path. If someone resolves to walk on the transcendent path, one must first develop a deep understanding of the Four Noble Truths (IQ). IQ – Intelligence Quotient – is about the rational intelligence; one first grasps the teaching of the Truths through rational thinking, then realizes the Truths through practice for self-benefit purpose.

Realization of Four Noble Truths should be based on meditation or mindfulness practice in daily life. Through the practice, the mind is thus trained to be calm and steady – which is the unshakable mind that is ready for sharp observation – in order to realize the Truths, and thorough penetration to break through the self-conceit or self-centeredness. Such efforts will eventually lead one back to the Four Dharma Seals (PQ) at the top central point. PQ – Paramita/Perfection Quotient – is actually not an English term; it is my creation. The meaning of "Paramita" in the Pali or Sanskrit language indicates something that is of utmost importance and

needs to be perfectly fulfilled in order to attain the ultimate liberation. The Four Dharma Seals in Buddhism are the Truth of impermanence, dukkha, non-self and nibbāna. They are the essential signposts in our practice and cultivation, as well as the ultimate goal that we resolve to realize.

It is impossible to directly accomplish the Four Dharma Seals without the Four Jhanas (AQ) – stability of the mind as the foundation – and thus is impossible to completely transform oneself and reach the ultimate goal – Nibbāna – without training the mind. Those who are still indulged in sensual desires, whose minds are still clinging to sensual pleasures, are not yet ready for practicing the transcendent Noble Path. For instance, there are many people who come to join this event (2017's Vesak Day) at our monastery. Different people come with different intentions; some come for the feast, some come for the entertainment, a few of them come for learning meditation, and even fewer of them are here for listening to the Dharma in order to purify his or her own mind. Different intentions will lead people towards different paths.

On the other hand, the triangle on the right connects EQ with AQ at the base and then back to PQ at the top central point. This path is Mahayana Buddhism, or the Northern Tradition. The main focus of this tradition is the practice of the Four Brahma Vihara (EQ): Loving-kindness, Compassion, Altruistic Joy and Equanimity. Practice of the Four Brahma Vihara emphasizes the development and purification of our emotion or temperament. If someone is always keen to help others, concern for others' benefits more than their own benefits, and is always happy to make more friends and support others, such person is less egoistic compared to others. Such generosity, loving-kindness and compassion are under EQ development. The finer a person's feeling towards others, the higher EQ one possesses. Such a person would always think of how to best apply his intelligence, knowledge, skills, experience, and wealth for

helping others. For instance, someone who has learnt the swimming skill (IQ), would first think of how he can apply the skill to help and save others (EQ) instead of helping oneself. In short, beings with high EQ are beings with a strong sense of empathy towards others.

However, there is a pitfall if keenness in helping others is without the right understanding and wisdom. A person who is always too compassionate and generous in offering help to others – without proper discernment – tends to get himself into trouble. Thus, the practice of loving-kindness and compassion needs to be purified. In fact, the Four Brahma Vihara in Chinese Buddhism can be divided into two parts: first part is loving-kindness and compassion, which is meant for benefiting others; the second part is altruistic joy and equanimity which is for benefiting oneself. One needs to practice these two parts in parallel, in order to benefit others as well as oneself. At the same time, one is also able to fulfil the practice of the Four Jhanas since constant contemplation is part of the Four Brahma Vihara. Through contemplation, meditation and mindfulness practice, and development of insight, one can thus progress on the transcendent Path towards realizing the Four Dharma Seals (PQ).

The basic requirements for self-practice, as the Buddha always taught and reminded his disciples, are: diligently guard one's six-sense doors, to be content with food and lodging, always be diligent in mindfulness practice and to overcome the five hindrances. Without proper mindfulness training (AQ), one is prone to be drowned by external excitements through the six-sense contacts all the time.

Training of the mind is the most challenging aspect for me. It requires long periods of tireless practice and training; there are many different skillful techniques and steps that one needs to learn and master as well. Thus, this is a most difficult training, especially for lay practitioners who are bound up with family and other

worldly responsibilities, and are hardly able to invest long hours for practice. For lay practitioners who are only afforded attending short meditation retreats, such short-term practice is like boiling the water for a short time and then putting it aside, again and again. The water will never be boiled under such on-and-off conditions.

What makes the modern lifestyle a much more challenging environment than in the past to practice meditation and cultivate mindfulness is the creation of i-devices, e.g. iPhone, iPad, iWatch, etc. These high-tech electronic devices are not simply for communication; they also cover up functions of most aspects in our lives as well. The creation of social media, for example, becomes a strong tendency to pull our mind into the virtual world, and to distract and excite the mind by a flood of external information. I wonder how much we can restrain ourselves and bring our mind back to the inner balanced state.

Here is a real story that shows how dangerous the world can be without mindfulness. There was a road accident which recently occurred in Texas. A bus driver was driving with eighteen passengers in his bus when he tried to send a text message using his mobile phone. The moment he was texting, a tragic hit happened and took away the lives of the 18 passengers, leaving the driver surviving alone. The driver was deeply remorseful for the accident, and said afterward that "I'm very sorry…." However, what is done cannot be undone. This is the world we are in nowadays.

Another real story is about a young man and his cellphone. This young man always immersed himself in the game in his cellphone wherever he went. One day the father was just too angry about his son's behavior, and the father grasped his son's cellphone and threw it into the street from their apartment window. Without a moment of hesitation, this young man tried to catch his cellphone by throwing himself out of the window as well! From these two real

stories around us, we can see how dangerous such an absent-minded habitual pattern to our lives is nowadays.

In conclusion, this diagram is my understanding of different Buddhist Traditions and how they are connected to each other as a whole. I hope that the introduction of this diagram will give you all a comprehensive understanding of Buddhist practices and help you to choose a Path that is suitable for yourself.

Master Jiru speaking at MABA

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Bhikshuni Kōngshí

釋空實

Venerable Kōngshí was born in Kuching, Sarawak, East Malaysia (northern part of Borneo), and after finishing high school, went to Northern Island to further her studies, graduating from Queen's University of Northern Ireland, U.K. in 1985. In 1989, Venerable moved, and worked on a small island called WP Labuan, in East Malaysia. She found the teachings of Buddhism at the local Buddhist Association, and then became very active in the Buddhist Association, participating in Buddhist teachings and retreats. Ven. Kōngshí, together with several friends, organized the Children & Youth programs, and invited Venerable Monastics to give teachings. Deciding to further her studies in the Buddhist teachings, she left the household life and went to Taiwan in 1996. Ven. Kōngshí was ordained under Venerable Master Jìrú at the Shuang Lin Monastery in Tao Yuan, Taiwan in 1997. She trained for the monastic life under Bhikshuni Zhao Hui and Bhikshuni Xin Guang in Shuang Lin Monastery, and joined Mid-America Buddhist Association (MABA) in July 1998.

Venerable Kōngshí

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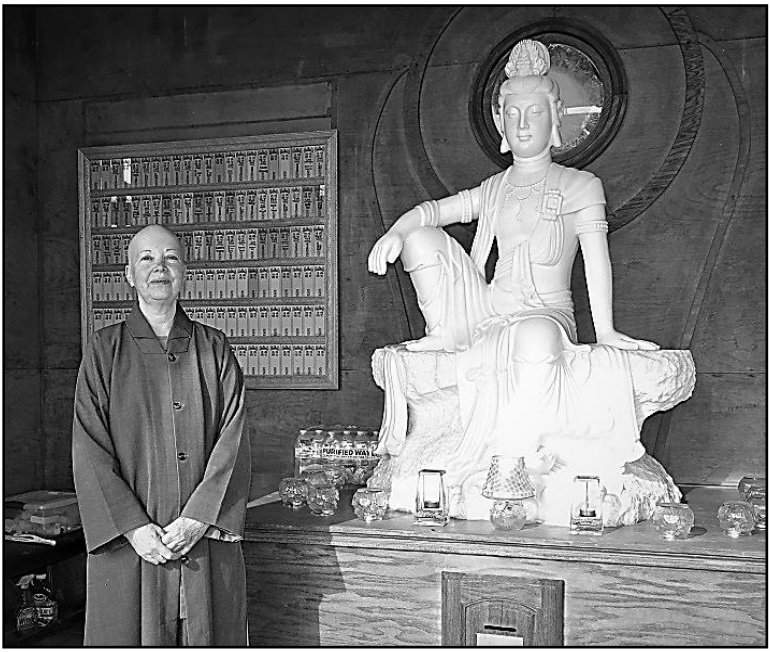
Bhikshuni Zhàozhàn

釋照湛

In 1990, Bhikshuni Zhàozhàn went to Tzu Han Memorial Hall in Taiwan to practice as a layperson, learning Buddhist rituals, meditation, monastic duties, and basic speaking in Chinese. She was ordained as a novice in March 1992, on the Birthday of Guānyīn Bodhisattva, and at the end of that year she received full ordination as a Bhikshuni. In 1993, she returned to Argentina. Since then, Bhikshuni Zhàozhàn traveled between Brazil and Argentina, collaborating in the translation of several English and Chinese Buddhist texts into Spanish and Portuguese. She met Master Jìrú when he visited Argentina in 2000. In 2008, Bhikshuni Zhàozhàn moved to Tzong Kwan Temple in Brazil. In 2013, when Master Jìrú visited Tzong Kwan Temple to give teachings, he invited her to join the Monastic Winter Retreat at MABA, where she has remained.



Venerable Zhàozhàn at the Guānyīn Pavilion

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Bhikshuni Kōngyán

釋空岩

Ven. Kōngyán is originally from Malaysia. She first learned about Buddhism in 2002 after reading *The Way to Buddhahood* by Venerable Master Yìnshùn. Her interest in Buddhism quickly flourished and she subsequently took refuges and precepts in December 2003. She has an undergraduate degree from Malaysia, a Master's degree in Forest Molecular Genetics from Michigan Technical University and a Ph.D. in Molecular Plant Science from Washington State University as of May 2012. As Venerable Kōngyán became more serious in learning Dharma, the interest of joining the Sangha to practice and share dharma with others slowly began to emerge. Consequently, she moved to MABA to practice here after completing her Ph.D. study. She was ordained in September 2012 as a novice and finished taking her full Bhikshuni ordination on December 2014 in Taiwan.

Venerable Kōngyán

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The Way from Human to Becoming Buddha

Talk by Master Yìnshùn
at Mahāyāna Xinyuan Temple, Manila, Philippines

Buddha in the Human World by Ven. Master Yìnshùn
Translation of Chapter Six
Venerable Kōngyán

《佛在人間》之第六章：「從人到成佛之路」，印順導師著

To study and practice Buddhism is to learn from the Buddha

With respect to *The Way from Human to Becoming a Buddha*[1], we first need to know ourselves as humans. To study the Buddha's Teaching (or the Dharma) from the standpoint of a human being, what should we study? How to study? Now I am going to talk about some simple preliminary steps, to let everybody know the key points of transforming a human into a buddha.

The Dharma needs to be understood from two aspects: First is the ultimate aspiration–the highest goal–to become a buddha. On the other hand, due to the various levels of human capacities, there are various skillful means and different practices, despite the final–ultimate–destination in becoming a buddha. This is just like the road that we walk on: some parts are broad and smooth, some are uneven, some are meandering, some are straightened out. However, if we have clearly targeted the final destination, "all roads lead to Chang-an." The topic that I am going to talk about today is: the way from human to becoming buddha is a broad and smooth way. If we follow this way, not only it is reliable and safe, but also easy (for us) to reach the destination.

To study and practice Buddhism is to learn from the Buddha, to take the Buddha as our example and learn from Him. How the

Buddha learned and practiced until He became a Buddha, we too will learn and practice like him. Thus, the real meanings of studying and practicing Buddhism are:

First, learning is not only for good fortune and happiness in future lives. Cultivating virtues such as generosity, etc., with a wish for a better future life, is the practice with an "intention for enhancement" in the Buddhist perspective. Its purpose is to seek future happiness and fortune fruition, for instance, to be reborn in a heaven realm, etc. This is just a skillful means in Buddhism, it is not the practice by taking the Buddha as an aspiration. This does not mean that, we do not need to pursue future betterment in the process of learning the Dharma. Before we become a buddha, of course, we always wish to be reborn in human or heaven realms. However, this is not the purpose of learning Buddhism. Everybody should take becoming a buddha as the goal. If we truly practice according to the Dharma, surely we will be able to attain it; as long as we have a distinguished and visionary ambition and fulfill it accordingly and realistically.

Why is it not good enough to be reborn into human and heaven realms? Because it is incomplete and imperfect. To be reborn into human world, wealth, money, life, status, and human affairs all are impermanent and ever-changing, thus it is incomplete and imperfect. Let's take the rebirth into heaven as an example, even Indra–the Lord of Heaven (equivalent to the Jade Emperor[2]) and the Maha-Brahma Heaven (equivalent to Jehovah in Hebrew)–are imperfect and impermanent, and will eventually fall to the lower realms. Those who believe in Jehovah the god surely would not agree with the idea that, Jehovah is actually incomplete. Let take the Maha-Brahma Heaven as the example then. He said: All things and human beings are created by him, born from him. We want to ask: "Was there any world before this world was created?" If there is not, then why did he want to create this world and human beings?

A reason given by the Brahman is: "For fun." This indicates that all these derivations are the results of the manifestation of self-freedom and self-satisfaction. This is similar to (someone who is)

feeling lonely and unsatisfied about a new empty house, and thus has to buy some furniture, ornamental vases, etc., to decorate it. Therefore, if a god can create human beings and all things, this simply shows that he "cannot stay alone." He feels empty inside and there is problem in his mind, and he is thus unable to stay with nothingness. For example, someone would feel very annoyed if one is too tied up, and wishes for a quiet rest on their own. Once he/she is finally able to take a rest in seclusion, he/she would feel lonely again; wanting to go out to take a look after wearying of being quiet for a long time. To create human beings and all things in the world for the reason of self-freedom and self-satisfaction, and consequently resulting in endless suffering and pain, is really getting oneself into trouble. Therefore, whoever feels unsatisfied inside and desirous of something, this indicates that there is a problem in one's mind, which is impure. When Buddhist practitioners talk about the practice of liberating from the cycles of birth and death, not only do they have to be able to abide calmly in the hustling and bustling surroundings and be contented with everything, they also have to be able to quiet the mind when staying alone; these are the "practitioners who are truly free from worldly affairs." Gods imagined by the theists, who still have desires and whose minds are unrestful, this is the main reason for their falling, thus we cannot take their way as the right way.

Second, learning is not only for self-liberation: All things in human and heaven realms are incomplete, therefore one must transcend the three realms, including the human and heaven realms, in order to be free from the cycles of birth and death. However, practicing the Dharma for the purpose of self-liberation is a narrow and tortuous path. Of course, the goal of practicing the Dharma is to be free from the cycles of birth and death, but one needs to have some regard for benefiting oneself and others at the same time. The Hīnayāna vehicle of freeing oneself from the cycles of birth and death is like drinking alcohol: one is drunk temporarily and mistakes that everything is over. Also, just like a pedestrian who is eager to take a rest at the roadside after running for a distance. The

more eager one is in reaching the destination, the slower he would be, actually. Just like the hare and tortoise race, the hare ran very fast, yet hurried to take a nap and rest, and thus was left behind later. If someone is hurried in freeing oneself from the cycles of birth and death, to be free from suffering and attain happiness, and to practice only for one's sake, this is nevertheless a meandering and tortuous route.

Third, learning is for attaining the great enlightenment of the Buddha. A true and correct way of learning the Dharma should be for the purpose of attaining the Buddha's great enlightenment; this is truly the right way, the direct and quick way toward the perfect enlightenment. The contents of great enlightenment are the perfection of faith and conviction, wisdom, and loving-kindness and compassion. For beginners, however, each individual might have different preferences: 1) More on faith and aspiration, seeking enlightenment. There are differences between sentient beings because of their different spiritual capacities. For example, a beginner who is a faith-follower, believing in the unsurpassed, supreme, and perfect virtues, the most supreme wisdom and the greatest loving-kindness and compassion of the Buddha. Relying on such conviction and admiration toward the Buddha, one takes the Buddha as the aspiration and resolves to seek the great enlightenment. 2) More on wisdom, tending to the dharma realm. There is another group of people, who target on the perfect enlightenment of the Buddha and focus on the wisdom, who want to probe down to the bottom of universal truth. What the universe actually is? What is the truth of human life? Buddha is the only most complete, most perfect and the most omniscient one. Therefore, they want to learn the great wisdom of the Buddha, and to reach the Buddha state through developing wisdom. 3) More on loving-kindness and compassion, liberating sentient beings. There is another group of people who commend and admire the great loving-kindness and compassion of the Buddha, and think that there is no other thorough salvation that can relieve humans and other beings from pain and suffering. The commonly salvaging means such as

advocating for moral culture, increasing the financial income, etc., are actually not the comprehensive approaches. The great loving-kindness and compassion of the Buddha is the only perfect and thorough method. They thus want to learn and practice the loving-kindness and compassion, toward attaining the Buddha's enlightenment. There are many ways of learning and practicing the Dharma, such as reciting the Amitabha Buddha is for faith-followers; reading, studying, and investigating for the purpose of understanding the Dharma is for wisdom-followers; those who are inclined to doing charity works are prone to developing loving-kindness and compassion. We can begin practicing with any one of these aspects, however all these virtues need to be learned eventually. Real Buddhist practitioners surely will learn and practice all these three aspects gradually, for attaining the supreme enlightenment.

Only human beings can learn Buddhism

First, the superior characteristics of human beings. In general, human beings have extremely strong self-esteem, yet always underestimate themselves; feeling that they are too insignificant, they thus refuse to take on the great mission to work hard and achieve the loftiest aspiration. This is a big mistake, in fact being a human is very meaningful. According to the Dharma, among the sentient beings in the six realms, the hell realm is too harsh, and hungry ghosts are always under unbearable starvation, so how could it be possible for them to resolve in learning the Dharma? Most of the animals are ignorant, they are unable to understand the meaning of Dharma-learning. Asuras have strong doubts, so it is impossible for them to firmly believe in the Buddha's words. Moreover, their hostility is fierce and they like to fight with each other. Celestial beings never have enjoyed their fortune enough, not to mention about learning the Dharma. Therefore, among the "three realms and eight hindrances," heaven with a long life is one of the eight hindrances. The Buddhist sutras say that, "It is rare to be a human being," "It is rare to listen to the Dharma." Human beings are

therefore the most superior being and are the only beings capable of learning the Dharma.

Someone asked me, "What is the difference between theism and Buddhism?" I replied, "According to theism, the human realm is not as good as the heaven realm. According to Buddhism, the human realm is better." Since we possess this human body, we should not waste–but respect–this human body, unleashing the superior features of humans and be diligent in enhancing oneself. This is one of the major features in Buddhism. What is the benefit of being a human? According to the scriptures, there are three superior characteristics possessed by humans that even the heaven beings cannot compare with. Though the Maha-Brahma Heaven and the god are noble and dignified, they are not as great as human beings. Because of these three superior characteristics possessed by the humans, the Buddha thus attained the great enlightenment specifically in the human realm, to preach and guide human beings to learn from the Buddha.

The three superior characteristics are: 1) Memory and recollection. The word "human" in the Indian Language means "memory and recollection." Human memory is stronger than anything else: we remember things from our childhood, and histories of thousands of years–the experiences of hundreds and thousands of years–can be preserved and passed on. Memory of animals, e.g., cows, sheep, pigs, and dogs, and even the deities, are not as good as ours. Human wisdom is the most powerful one. All cultures and scientific inventions are grounded on the memory and recollection and accumulation of the past experiences. This is what human beings improve on, and invent day-by-day. The power of wisdom that comes from memory and recollection is beyond the reach of all other beings. 2) Pure conduct (Brahma-cariya). To restrain sensual impulses for the benefit of other beings, this is moral conduct; one would sacrifice oneself for the benefits of others. The morality rooted in pure conduct is one of the great features of humans. 3) Being bold and vigorous. Human beings–who survive

in this sahā world–are able to endure all kinds of suffering, and to overcome all kinds of difficulties. Such unwavering determination and perseverance are also one of the superior features of human beings, which the heaven realm is lacking. These three superior features, if being applied for evil actions–where intelligence is being abusively manipulated–will result in horrendous crimes and worsen the suffering of human beings. However, various good deeds are stemmed from these (three superiorities) as well. If we apply them for cultivating wholesomeness, it would be equivalent to the great wisdom, great kindness, and great courage mentioned by the Chinese.

We all know that all sentient beings have the Buddha-nature (possibility of becoming a buddha), and are able to attain the Buddhahood. In the scriptures, there are four kinds of virtues pertaining to the Buddha-nature: they are wisdom, loving-kindness and compassion, joyous faith and samādhi (concentration). Morality is related to loving-kindness and compassion, and there is diligence in the joyous faith. Thus, these three superior characteristics of human beings are three of the four virtues pertaining to the Buddha-nature, which are especially well-developed in a human. Therefore, it is easy to accomplish (attaining Buddhahood) by learning and practicing as human beings, as it is easy for human beings to learn the Dharma. Pei-xiu, the prime minister in the Tang Dynasty once said that all sentient beings are capable of becoming a buddha, however, a human being is the only being among the six realms who is really able to resolve with Bodhi mind and practice the Bodhisattva Path. The virtues of Buddha-nature are most developed in human beings, and thus only human beings are able to learn the Dharma and becoming buddha.

Second, progress from the human realm toward the Buddha realm. Among the skillful means of learning the Dharma, such as to be reborn into heaven and to attain the Hīnayāna fruition, are mostly meandering and tortuous. For example, practicing the method of heaven and consequently being born into the long-life heaven, is

one of the eight hindrances that obstructs the Dharma learning. Some thought that, let's first learn the Hīnayāna teaching to realize the Arahatship and be free from the cycles of birth and death. The Hīnayāna practice is just like someone who is drunk and falls asleep halfway through the journey: it is incomplete and not quick. Thus, we should take the simple and direct route: start with the human state and seek to be reborn as a human (repeatedly) until we reach the Buddha state. We do not seek to be reborn in heaven, nor to attain the Hīnayāna fruition. Relying on this human form, seeking to be reborn in human form, and progressing toward Buddhahood without leaving the human form, all need to begin with human affairs. Some people consider themselves practicing the Buddha's Teaching, when, in fact they believe and practice the mysterious method of the Heaven Emperor; or for those who emphasize only the meditation and ignore the wisdom, are actually practicing the methods of heaven.

Some people are lacking in great compassion, and although they have deeply studied the Mahāyāna teaching, they are still walking on the Hīnayāna path. Methods of heaven and Hīnayāna though, can eventually be returned to the way of Buddhahood, yet it is a meandering way. Particularly in this era, we should first practice the method of human–the righteous actions in the human world without leaving the human world–and advance directly from human toward Buddhahood, to avoid misunderstanding people. Proclivity of the sentient beings in this era is different (from the past), especially the Chinese who emphasize the ethnic and morality of human. Therefore, the Chinese Buddhists should start with practicing the morality and human ethics. The more righteous actions we have practiced and accumulated in the human world, the more the causal virtues for Buddhahood are accumulated at the same time, and thus we will move gradually closer to the Buddha state. We should not misspend ourselves, should make full use of this very short human life, and diligently move toward achieving this goal.

Faith and understanding are requisites for learning Dharma

Faith and understanding are the requisites in practicing the Buddha way. There are eight things mentioned in the canons, that I am going to briefly summarize them into six:

First, the power and virtues of the Triple Gems. Triple Gems are the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Let's talk about the Buddha and the Sangha. The buddhas and bodhisattvas (Mahāyāna sangha) of the Mahāyāna Teaching possess of lofty wisdom, loving-kindness and compassion which deserve our respect and admiration. Furthermore, they have the inconceivable power to accomplish tasks that ordinary people fail to do. Not only do we have to believe in the power, virtues, and superhuman abilities of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, but also believe that there are virtues and power in the Dharma–the Dharma-gate of becoming a Buddha–which enable us to accomplish the ultimate goal if we practice according to the Dharma.

Second, the reality of all dharmas–all dharmas include all things and phenomena–all things that we know in the world are insubstantial. Why? This can be explained in two aspects: 1) All things are ever-changing–ranging from human up to the earth–and are impermanent and incomplete. 2) All worldly things are relatively present; there is wholesome and thus there is unwholesome, there is birth and thus there is death, there is prosperity and thus there is failing; this exists and thus that exists, this family exists and thus that family exists, this country exists and thus that country exists. There are different factions within a country, there are parties outside of a party, and factions inside a party. This is the world of relative differences and is full of dilemmas, and thus all these are not the ultimate reality. Everything in the world is the world of relativity and impermanence; thus, human beings who live in this world are incomplete as well. Real Buddhist practitioners have to believe and understand that there is the truth of eternally permanent (and equal without distinction), in the midst of various

ever-changing and distinctive phenomena. We could experience the truth if we learn and study it in a correct way, and practice it accordingly. Pain and suffering will then be eradicated and disappear; the buddhas and bodhisattvas too are born from it.

Third, purity of cause-and-effect. In general, people know about the Dharma and take cause-and-effect seriously, however cause-and-effect is not necessarily pure. Not only killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and false speech–evil causes and evil effects which are impure–even the ordinary practices such as generosity, worshipping the Buddha, and sutra recitation are not necessarily pure as well. For example, the virtues of generosity of course are wholesome. But not if someone thinks that "I can do good deeds," or "I can donate more than other people," or the intention of giving is to make other people be subservient to him/her. As long as there is an "I" conceit with the intention of gaining future wholesome fruition, it is impure: neither clean nor pure. Thus, Buddhist disciples have to believe the presence of pure cause-and-effect, the taintless cause-and-effect of liberating from defilements and self-view. With pure and clean causal action, one can thus attain the pure and clean fruition. Thus, we have to take the Buddha as our aspiration, and firmly believe in the purity of cause-and-effect.

Fourth, the ability to attain the enlightenment. We may not be able to learn the Dharma and become a buddha by simply believing in the three aspects mentioned above. Some people might say that, "I am too stupid," or, "I am just too busy." If we cannot trust and have confidence in ourselves, how can we be resolved in the learning and practice? Thus, we should strengthen our self-confidence; all human beings have the Buddha-nature. I am, too, able to attain the great enlightenment. Do our best whenever we have the ability to do so. If we cannot make it today, there is tomorrow; if we cannot make it in this lifetime, there is a future lifetime. Firmly believe that, as long as we resolve in learning and practicing continuously, surely we will attain the enlightenment.

Fifth, the skillful means of attaining the Way. All sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature, everybody is able to do it. However, the Buddha is the result of His own learning and practice;

if we follow His method, everyone is able to attain Buddhahood too. The method of practice and cultivation is called "the skillful means of attaining the Way." For example, it is not enough for us to believe that there is water underground, we have to know how to dig the well and suck up the water. If not, we will not have water to drink even though there is water underground. We need the means to attain it. Thus, there is a saying: there is no untaught Maitreya, no Sakya by nature.

Sixth, the holy Teaching of the Tathāgata. We are not the Buddha; how do we know the way to Buddhahood? After the Buddha attained the great enlightenment, the Buddha expounded the method of becoming a buddha out of his great loving-kindness and compassion, which was being recorded in the canons. If we believe in the teaching of sutras, vinaya, and commentaries, and pursue the knowledge based upon the teaching, confidence will then grow and subsequently strengthen the power of Dharma learning. Do read if you can read, do listen if you cannot read, there are various means of attaining the Buddhahood inside (the canons).

Begins with learning from the Bodhisattva of ten wholesome behaviors

In order to have a comprehensive understanding of the Buddha, we need to learn from the "Bodhisattvas of ten wholesome behaviors." Many people are unfamiliar with and misunderstand the meaning of *bodhisattva*. *Bodhisattva* is an Indian word, *Bodhi* means awakening; *sattva* means beings. Hence, bodhisattvas are the beings who pursue the great awakening. There are bodhisattvas of different levels, some are high and some are low. In the ordinary minds, they would think of great bodhisattvas, e.g., Wénshū (Mañjuśrī), Pǔxián (Samantabhadra), Guānyīn (Avalokiteśvara), Dìzàng (Kṣitigarbha) when they hear about bodhisattvas. In fact, all beings who have resolved to become a buddha are bodhisattvas.

The difference between buddha and bodhisattva is: a Buddha has reached the highest, most supreme, and ultimate perfections,

just like someone who has finished their studies and graduated; bodhisattvas are students who are still studying and advancing themselves. The beginners who have just started to study are like the kindergarten students; students of elementary school, middle school, college and up to graduate school are all students. The only difference is their level of education; the process of studying remains the same. The same for bodhisattvas: there are beginner bodhisattvas who have just resolved to seek enlightenment. The beginner bodhisattvas are just like us ordinary people, who are able to resolve with a Bodhi mind, and make the great vow to become a buddha. Then, they slowly study and practice up to very a high level that is equivalent to Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara, etc. So, do not just think of the great bodhisattvas, otherwise we would feel that we are unable to do it. In school, we begin with kindergarten and continue up to graduate school. It is the same for bodhisattvas: they begin to learn as beginner bodhisattvas, continue, and work up to becoming great bodhisattvas. Now, let us talk about the beginner bodhisattvas who have just started to learn. Their mind state is similar with us ordinary people, and thus it is easy and practical for us to learn from them.

First, a bodhisattva's aspiration is motivated by great compassion. Of course, the aspiration of bodhisattvas consists of faith, vow, and wisdom, however great compassion is the underlined point. Those who are motivated by great compassion and thus wish for becoming a buddha and liberating sentient beings are bodhisattvas. As illustrated above, it is impossible to attain the goal without loving-kindness and compassion. Even if someone is able to thoroughly investigate and understand the ultimate truth, without great compassion, one will still fall into the Hīnayāna way. The crucial key point of a bodhisattva is great compassion. Seeing the suffering of sentient beings as if it were one's own pain and suffering, and thus want to try one's best to help and liberate them, is the Bodhi mind, the real Buddha seed. To aspire is to set one's mind on keeping up the great compassion all the times, and never forget about the great aspiration and vow. Once such mindset is set, to be determined, and never retrogress, this is called "ascending the

bodhisattva stage." There are many means of practicing and arousing the great compassion, and there is a method called "exchanging self with others:" take others as oneself, and take oneself as others. The great compassion will naturally arise by doing so.

I would like to ask everyone: What is your most loved one? Your answers must be parents, husband and wife, friend, country, nation, etc. Actually, the Buddha said, "One loves no one more than oneself." Of course, we love our parents, etc., as long as it does not cause loss of our own benefits, otherwise we are not going to love anyone or anything. The love for all is stemmed from self-love that is rooted in selfishness. If we can take pain and suffering of others as our own suffering–not only do we love others as if we love ourselves–when we are able to stand in other people's shoes and do not just think from our own perspectives, then that is the true love, the true loving-kindness and compassion. When we have suffering, everyone wants to get rid of it eagerly. If suffering of others is our own suffering, how could it possible for us to not be compassionate and do our best to liberate them from the suffering! Great compassion will arise naturally if we have this kind of concept. Once one's great compassion arises, and they vow to become a buddha and to liberate sentient beings, this is a bodhisattva. Therefore, it is unnecessary for beginner bodhisattvas to possess supernatural power or magnificent physical appearance. Yet, it is inadequate simply to aspire and resolve, one must accomplish the ultimate goal through righteous actions.

Second, the ten wholesome behaviors are the righteous practices of bodhisattvas. The difference between a bodhisattva and an ordinary person is that they arouse the Bodhi mind and practice the Bodhisattva Path. Those who practice the ten wholesome behaviors with a Bodhi mind, are beginner bodhisattvas, or bodhisattva of ten wholesome behaviors. Ten wholesomeness are the ten wholesome behaviors antidote to the ten evils. No killing (taking of lives) means cherishing lives. No stealing means not to gain wealth illegally; nonetheless, to give generously. No sexual misconduct means not

to be impolite. No false speech means no lying. No divisive speech means not to foment trouble between people in order to destroy the harmony between them. No harsh words means do not scold nor mock other people using harsh words. Do talk nicely and gently even when we try to point out people's mistakes, and never speak using a spiteful tongue. Flattery is speech that is pleasant to hear, yet will arouse various unwholesome actions such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, etc. It is the evil speech that encourages people to steal, kill, and commit sexual misconduct; empty speech that is devoid of content and wasting time. No flattery means that we need to say something that is beneficial to the social morality and to the people. No craving means we just take what we need, be contented, easily satisfied, and never vainly dream of taking something that does not belong to us.

No hatred means having loving-kindness and no fighting. No evil view means right views that Buddhist practitioners need to develop: believe in wholesome and unwholesome cause-and-effect, previous and future lifetimes, cycles of birth and death, and the stage of the enlightened ones: arahats, bodhisattvas, and buddhas who are able to be free from cycles of birth and death. Never let evil view and knowledge arise, nor think that everything ends after one's death. Bodhisattvas of ten wholesome behaviors are beginner bodhisattvas, and great compassion is the focal point of their great Bodhi mind. To learn and practice according to the ten wholesome behaviors–in order to become a buddha and to liberate sentient beings–is something that everyone is capable of learning and practicing. If someone says that he/she does not know how to do it, the person must look at himself/herself. According to the Dharma: For humans to have a sound and strong personality, one has to begin with practicing the five precepts and ten wholesome behaviors. Ten wholesome behaviors are the righteous practices of human life. If those who are endowed with lofty morality are able to realize the ten wholesome behaviors, yet they lack great compassion, they are simply the noble ones in the mundane world, the noble gentlemen among the people. It is different in Buddhism: the ten wholesome

behaviors are guided by the Bodhi mind which is resolved around great compassion. Therefore, it is also the first step for a human to move forward in becoming a Buddha.

Let's take the Buddha as the ideal, arouse our Bodhi minds, and practice the ten wholesome behaviors. In addition to repentance, making vows, paying homage to the Buddha, and chanting the Buddha's name, we need to be ardent in protecting the Dharma, and take the Dharma as our very own life; do not think that "I just want to learn from the Buddha." If the Dharma is being destroyed and devastated, we should protect and preserve it for the sake of our faith and conviction, for the sake of the wisdom-life of sentient beings. What the bodhisattvas need to practice are many; I am unable to detail every one of them now. Finally, I wish for every one of you to be kindergarten bodhisattvas and begin to learn the first step of this Mahāyāna Vehicle. Let's start with developing great compassion and practicing the ten wholesome behaviors.

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[1] "Buddha" is a Sanskrit/Pali term which means "fully awakened one."
[2] Jade Emperor is the supreme deity of Taoism.

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Chán Hall, completed in 1998
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CHÁN MEDITATION HALL

The Chán Meditation Hall, which first opened in 1998, is a sacred place where our weekly Sunday service is held. It is a spacious room on the second floor, covered in hardwood flooring, and large open windows that provide natural lighting and fresh air. Meditation mats and cushions, as well as chairs, are provided for all visitors. It is customary to remove shoes before entering the meditation hall, bow to the Buddha sculpture upon entering and leaving, and be extra mindful and courteous of those concentrating in meditation. Chán Hall not only provides space for our Sunday meditations, but for public retreats and ceremonies as well. The ground floor–formerly our kitchen and dining areas, now located in the Blue Lotus House–provides indoor space for additional events, such as study and discussion groups. The library remains, with books available both for loan and for a modest donation.

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GUĀNYĪN PAVILION

Guānyīn Pavilion is a secluded meditation area nestled by trees and flowers overlooking the tranquil lake at MABA. The namesake of the pavilion is after Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva (Guānyīn Púsà), one of the two principal Bodhisattvas that assisted the Buddha in delivering the teachings to the populace. "Guānyīn" denotes the action by this very Bodhisattva of "observing all worldly voices" with the intention of lending a helping hand whenever and wherever she hears a needy whimper. Such noble intention and acts certainly deserve due respect and, hopefully, replication by all practitioners of Buddhism. The building was completed in 2003.

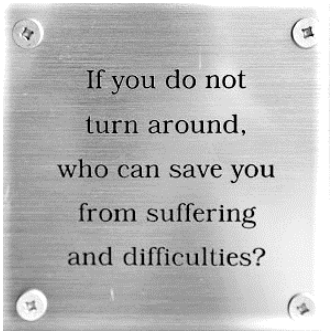
Guānyīn means the one who listens to the sound of suffering in the world. She sits in the "easy pose," open to all who come forward to ask for her help. We often recite the Heart Sūtra in her presence.

Guānyīn, the most popular and beloved of all the Bodhisattvas, is depicted as both female and male in India (Avalokiteśvara), as male in Tibet (Chenrezig–the g is silent: Chen-ray-zee), as female in Japan (Kannon), and either male or female in China (Guānyīn).

The Guānyīn sculpture at the Guānyīn Pavilion

Guānyīn is the mind-state of Great Compassion; the poetic verses on posts to either side of the sculpture are in both Chinese and English (*shown, below*).

If you can
transform your mind,
why do you need my
great loving kindness
and great compassion?



If you do not
turn around,
who can save you
from suffering
and difficulties?

Lay Sangha

Authentic Buddhism

Xiǎnzhì Katty Choi
Senior Lay Dharma Teacher

The first time I came across "Authentic" Buddhism was in 1994. I was invited to help file paper work for a Non-Profit Organization by a dear friend of mine, Tami. At the time, I was running an over-capacity life: a 50 hour per week full-time job, two young children at home, and a 16-client base accounting business. Therefore, the only time slot I could provide for a meeting was after 9 pm on one Friday evening.

When I arrived at my friend's house, it was very quiet. There were about 15 to 16 people in the room. Only one voice was talking. I stood by the doorway and listened. I recognized every single word the speaker said, but the words didn't make any sense to me; I didn't understand the meanings. It was so strange to me. One phrase that caught my attention was: "You are answerable for your own actions." This struck me to the core of my heart.

From then on, I started to open my mind and my eyes to the teaching of the Buddha. Buddhism is not just bowing down, lighting incense, and praying for good health and prosperity. I joined the Buddhist study group organized by fellow practitioners and students.

I began to read Buddhist texts and listen to tapes of Dharma talks. I tried to attend the discourses given by visiting Monastics and Dharma teachers.

In 1995, we invited Master Jìrú to give Dharma talks. Everyone who attended benefitted tremendously, and we asked him to station in St Louis. With great compassion, he agreed, and MABA officially has had a live-in Monastic since then.

I took Refuge to the Triple Jewels and committed to observe the Five Precepts, with Master Jìrú as my Dharma Teacher and Preceptor. Master assigned a book authored by Venerable Master Yìnshùn, "The Way to Buddhahood," which became my "Main Guidance on the Path." In 2007, I took the Bodhisattva Vows conferred by Master Jìrú.

Starting 1999, since my first 10-day Vipassana Meditation retreat, I have been practicing and trying to attend the retreats at various centers as much as time allows. So far, I have attended about eight 10-day retreats, and participated as a Dharma worker a few times at the retreat centers.

In 2003, I was very fortunate to be admitted to the Master of Buddhist Studies program offered by Hong Kong University, and I graduated with a Master's degree in Buddhist Studies in 2004. I was trained systematically in studying Buddhism; courses I took under the master program included: Mahāyāna and Theravada Buddhism, History of Buddhism in China, Mediation, the Buddhist Way, and Basic Pali Language.

I had participated in helping with Buddhist article translations from Chinese into English and translations on some pieces of the Buddhist Art clips from English to Chinese.

Currently, I am one of the appointed lay teachers at MABA. I have also signed up for three internet courses: "The Way to Buddhahood," "Exploring the Nature of Emptiness," and "The Sequence of the Enlightenment Path," taught by a great Buddhist teacher, Teacher Lin, in Taiwan.

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Training in Perfecting Faith

Xiǎnzhì Katty Choi

Introduction ~

Faith is a key factor in all Religions. In Buddhism, Faith is considered as: *"The Origin and Foundation of the Path of Liberation, also the mother of all Merits."* Faith, in Buddhism means more than blindly following the teachings or doctrines. It means more than a religious devotion. As in the famous "Kālāmas Sūtta," the Buddha instructed the Kālāmas: "Ehipassiko…" meaning: "Come and see for yourself."

The Kālāma Sūtta states (Pali expression in parentheses):

- Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing (anussava),
- nor upon tradition (paramparā),
- nor upon rumor (itikirā),
- nor upon what is in a scripture (piṭaka-sampadāna)
- nor upon surmise (takka-hetu),
- nor upon an axiom (naya-hetu),
- nor upon specious reasoning (ākāra-parivitakka),
- nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over (diṭṭhi-nijjhān-akkh-antiyā),
- nor upon another's seeming ability (bhabba-rūpatāya),
- nor upon the consideration, the monk is our teacher (samaṇo no garū).

"Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them."

The definition of the Pali Word "Saddhā"–translated as faith–also means trust and confidence. In Buddhism, Righteous or Perfect Faith is one of the important factors that lead to attaining the first fruition or entering the stream of liberation. There are some criteria to be met before entering the stream and Faith is the catalyst assisting the practice in each step of the path of liberation.

Chart I shows the path and the process, and **Chart II** shows the sequence of the practice; both are self-explanatory.

Speaking of faith or devotion, there has to be object/objects to devote to or have faith in. In Buddhism, The Triple Jewels are the objects: The Buddha as the teacher or the founder of the religion; The Dharma, his teaching or the doctrines he taught; The Sangha, the followers or practitioners. In addition to the Triple Jewels, another object that a practitioner has to have faith in is the Sīla, moral disciplines. These four objects are referred as the "Four Objects of Indestructible Faith." See the middle part of Chart I.

In Dr. Yang Yuwen's text, the [Āgama Saṅkhepa] (A Short Treatise of the Āgamas); Chapter Two specialized in developing superior Faith. The chapter provides sequential guidance with references from the discourses collected in the Āgamas.

Chart III illustrates the structure of Chapter Two: Training to Perfecting Faith, starting with the Objects in which a practitioner may develop Faith.

There are four conditions or prerequisites before entering into the stream of liberation. By practicing the four prerequisites and through developing and strengthening Faith in these Four Objects, a practitioner will advance from the pre-training state; step by step, reach the final goal – attaining Arahatship.

Chart IV illustrates the conditions and sequences of practice, and the levels of Faith developed on the path purifications.

The Study, the Path and the Process

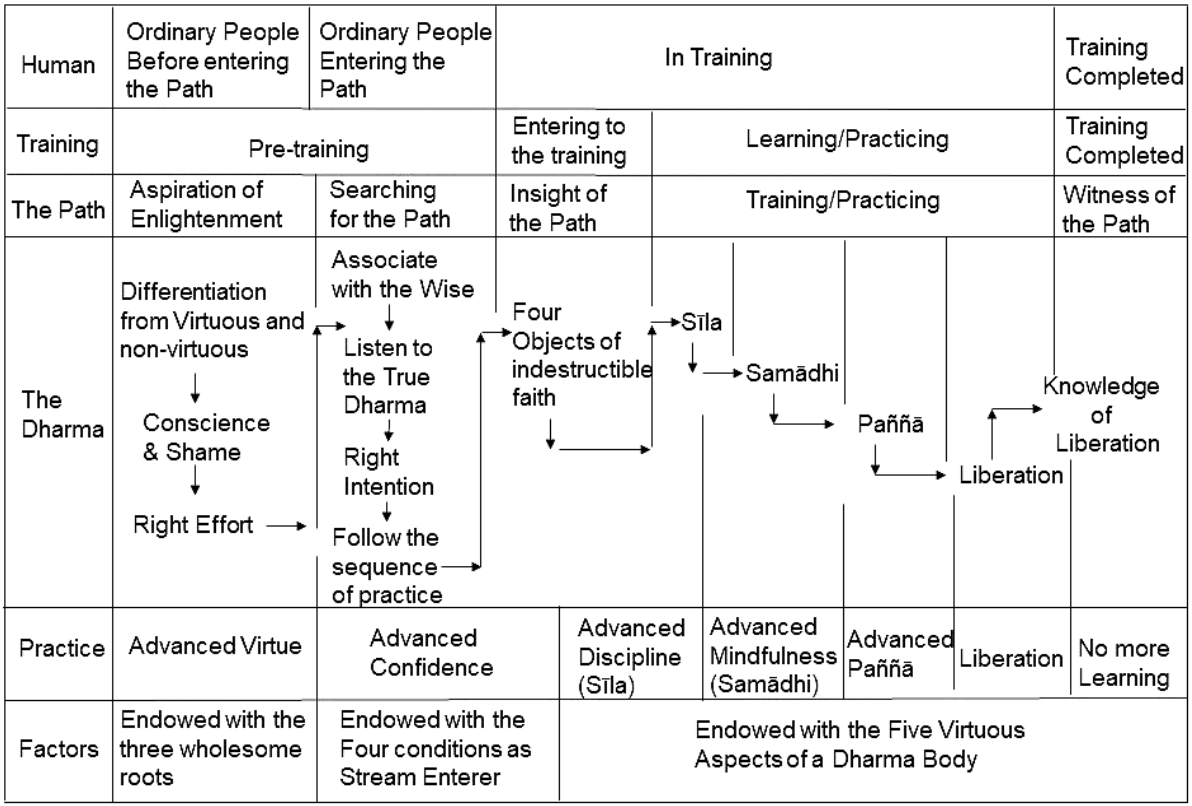


Chart II

The Sequence of Practice – The Path

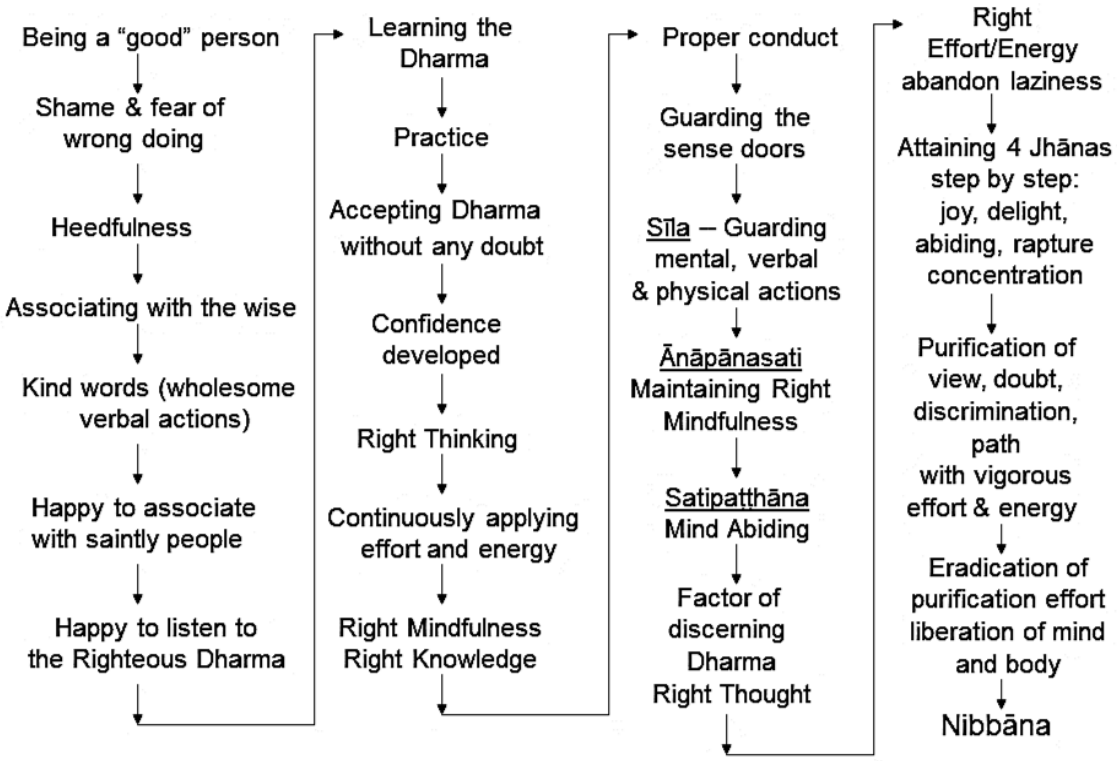


Chart III

Structure of Chapter Two: Training to Perfecting Faith

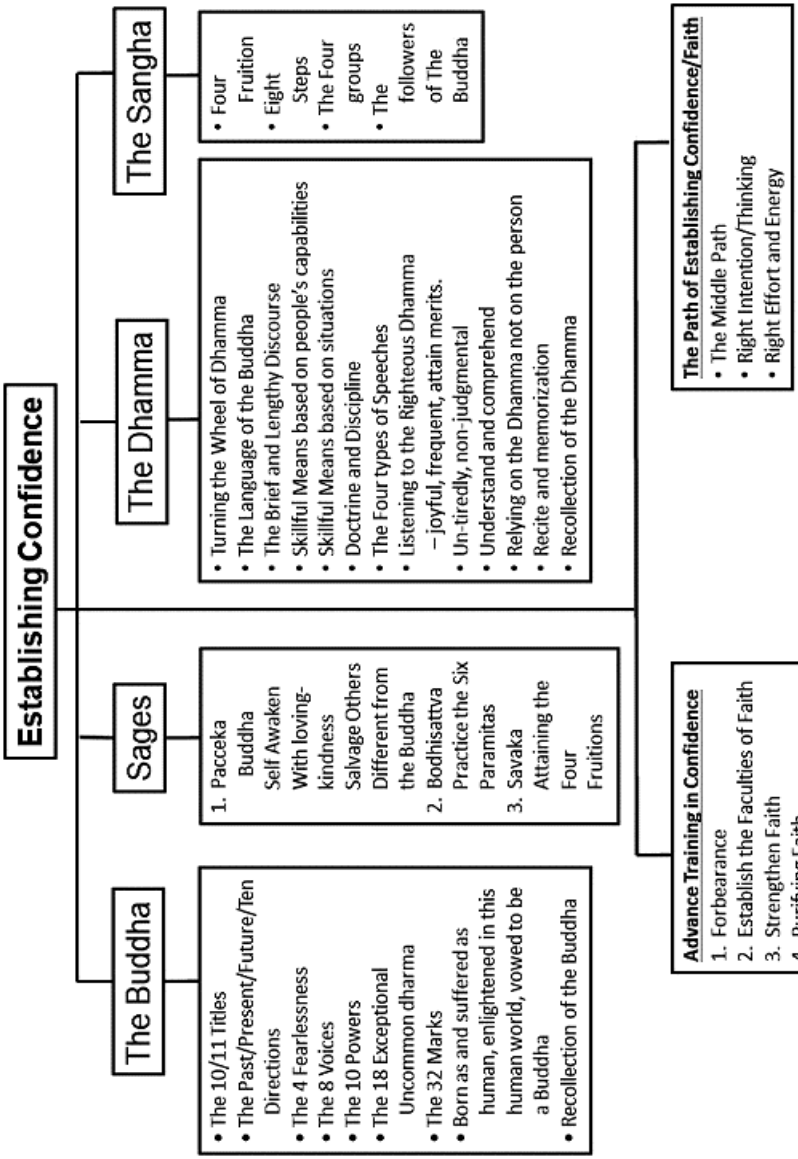
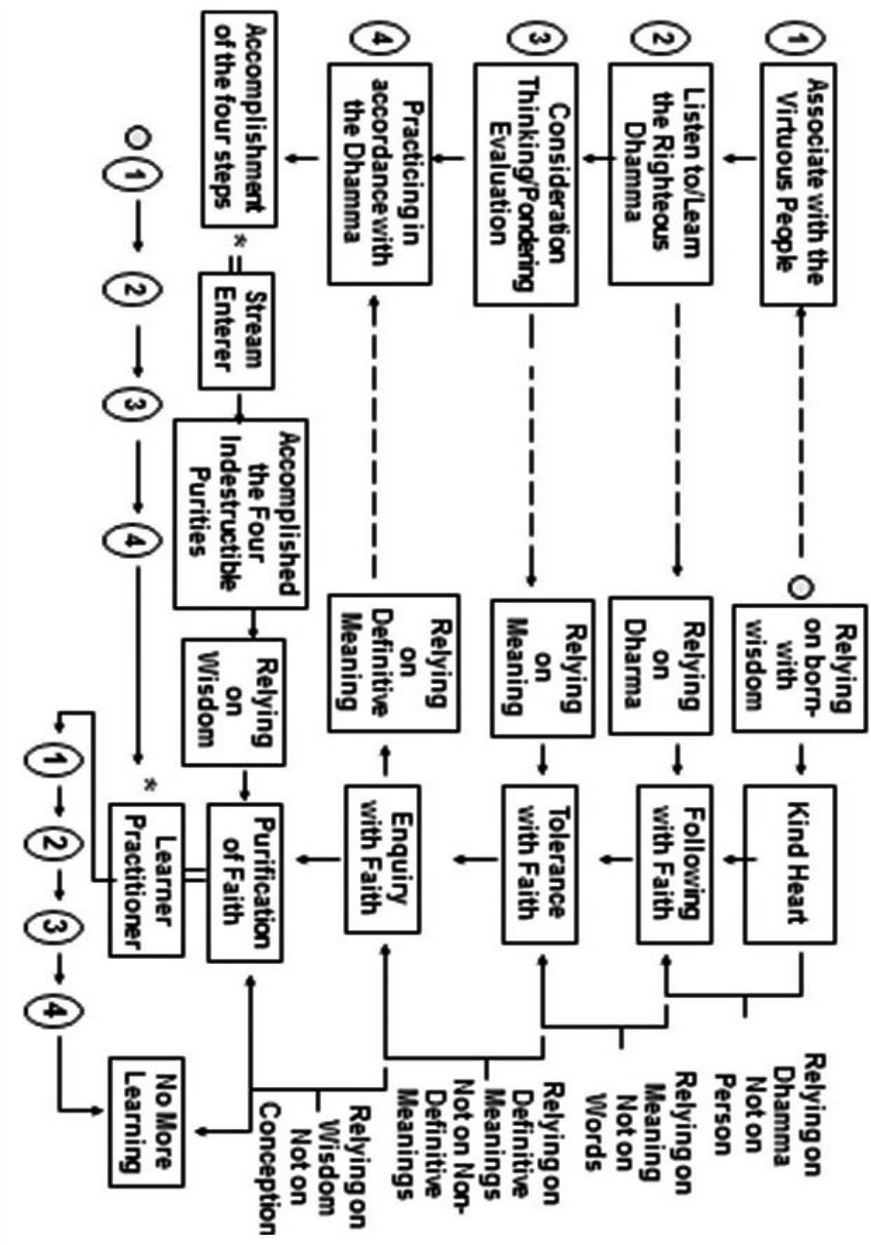


Chart IV


1 Associate with the Virtuous People
2 Listen to/Learn the Righteous Dhamma
3 Consideration Thinking/Pondering Evaluation
4 Practicing in accordance with the Dhamma
Relying on born-with wisdom
Relying on Dharma
Relying on Meaning
Relying on Definitive Meaning
Kind Heart
Following with Faith
Tolerance with Faith
Enquiry with Faith
Relying on Dhamma Not on Person
Relying on Meaning Not on Words
Relying on Definitive Meanings Not on Non-Definitive Meanings
Relying on Wisdom Not on Conception
Purification of Faith
Learner Practitioner
Relying on Wisdom
Accomplished the Four Indestructible Purities
Stream Enterer
Accomplishment of the four steps
No More Learning

<u>At the first stage</u>:

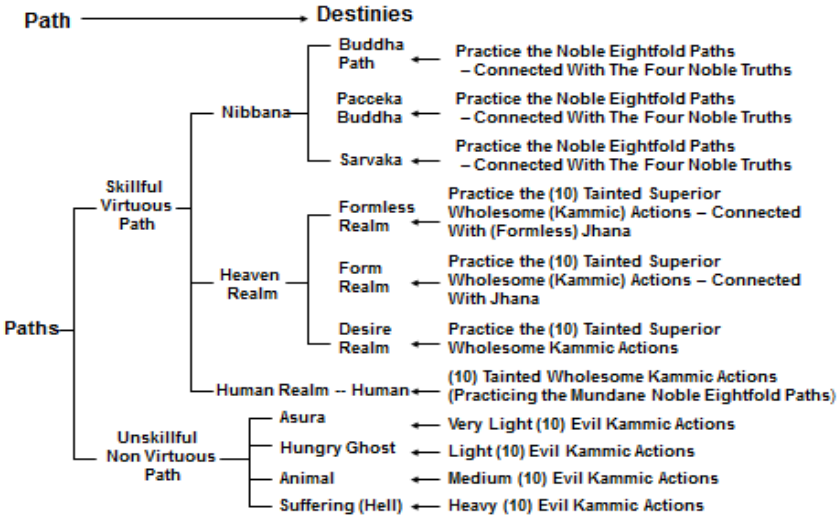
A practitioner, endowed with born-with wisdom and with the mundane level Right View, he begins with associating with the wise or virtuous people (ideally with the Buddha and the sages).

Basically, there are four Right Views at the mundane level:

1. Able to differentiate wholesome and unwholesome, virtuous and non-virtuous, kindness and ill-will
2. Understand cause and effect
3. Know and accept the concept of three period and cycle of rebirth
4. Understand that there are ordinary untrained people verses the sages or liberated people

In Buddhism, there different paths, or destinations, that people may "choose" or land on; depends on one's actions and Karmic energy accumulated (See Chart V).

Chart V



Associating with virtuous friends and wise people plays a very important part on the path of liberation. As mentioned in SN 45.2, the Upaddha Sūtta, the Buddha told Venerable Ánanda that, "…Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life.…" However, when associating with virtuous friends or the wise, a practitioner should understand that it is the Dharma that he is aiming for, not personal, or idol worshiping. Therefore, he should rely on the righteous teaching that a virtuous friend provides and not relying the individual.

The following are some definitions and descriptions of virtuous friends from various Sūttas:

Virtuous Person

1. Translations: 善男子善女人 [good sons, good women]
   善知識 [good and virtuous friend]
2. Good and virtuous friends
   a) Worldly (Mundane) Good and Virtuous Friends – AN 8.55; SN1.53
   b) Supra-Mundane Good and Virtuous Friends
      -- The Four Fruitions – AN 3.141/142/143
      -- The Seven steps of Nibbana and Nibbana without remainder – AN7.55; MN 70
   c) Ultimate Good and Virtuous Friends – The Buddha– SN 45.2; SN 2.18(8)
3. Good Friends who teach the Righteous Dhamma – AN 10.61; SN 22.115/116; 35.155
4. The True Man Discourse (Sappurisa Sūtta) – MN 113

To associate means to practice (e.g. practice together with the virtuous and wise people); love, close to, offer; and to serve (e.g., Venerable Ánanda served the Buddha) respectfully – MN 108; AN 10.156~166. One must be open-minded and humble to accept the

teaching with respectfulness and soft speech – AN 10.76, MN 5, DN 31.

Bowing down and joining palms are some of the ways to respect and salute the Buddha. However, the best way to respect and salute the Buddha is to develop "Insight of Emptiness of all Phenomena." According to the Sūttas, the best offering to the Buddha is the Flower of Enlightenment (DN 117); that is accepting and practice the Dharma and reaching the final goal of enlightenment.

<u>At the second stage</u>:

Relying on the teachings he learned from the wise; the practitioner proceeds to the next stage – Listening to the Righteous Dharma. Practitioners will now rely on the Dharma he learned and follow the teacher and the teaching with Faith.

The attitude and mind-set when listening to the Dhamma:

(1) The Eight types of mind –
1. joyful,
2. full-hearted,
3. soft-hearted,
4. patience,
5. keen,
6. concentrated,
7. doubtless,
8. hindrance-free – (AN 8.21).

(2) The Sixteen kinds of attitude –
1. attention at all times,
2. respectfulness,
3. joyful desire,
4. non-attachment,
5. practice accordingly,
6. overcome obstructions,
7. respectful to the Dhamma,

8. respectful to the speaker,
9. do not slander the Righteous Dhamma,
10. do not slander the speaker,
11. do not doubt oneself,
12. with no scattered mind (concentration),
13. desire to understand,
14. listening with attention,
15. right thinking in accordance to the teaching,
16. memorize after listening.

If there is discourse available, the practitioner should go and listen to the Dharma frequently. In addition, while listening to the Dharma, the practitioner should not make casual judgments on the speaker or others:

1. Based on their appearance – (SN 21.6)
2. Based on whether they observe the precepts or not – (AN 10.75)
3. Whether they can speak the Dhamma well or not – (AN 3.141)
4. Ask for explanation from the Tathāgata (MN 47); (or other virtuous teachers)

However, when choosing the virtuous teacher, the practitioner should choose someone who understands and has knowledge about the Dhamma; someone who respects and practices the pure and superior practices (AN 4.194).

It is very important that when listening to the Dharma, one has to make sure that he is relying on the Dhamma, not on the individual. As mentioned in the sūtta, one should not attach to certain person (MN 108) and it is dangerous to have faith in a single person.

In addition, one should be mindful of the Dhamma (AN 3.63); and be mindful of the Dhamma at all time (AN 6.10).

The Dhamma, teachings of the Buddha are extremely profound. Therefore, many commentaries were written by great Buddhist

masters and scholars, trying to explain the concepts of the Buddha's teachings. When listening to the Dhamma, practitioners should pay attention to the meanings and key concepts of the teachings and avoid being side-tracked by the wordings and languages.

<u>At the Third stage</u>:

The practitioner's Faith is now strengthened, he is ready to go one step further on the path. He becomes more patient and eager to learn. He pays close and careful attention to the teaching. He should consider and think; try to comprehend the concepts and meanings of the Dharma.

The practitioner has to be mindful and make sure that he understands the definitive concepts and not non-definitive concepts; that is, he is following the Righteous Dharma.

Right Intention and Right Thinking are necessary at this state. The practitioner should investigate and analyze the teaching he learned from the virtuous teachers making sure that he clearly understands the meanings. He should pay careful attention, starting from the origin of all phenomena (i.e. finding out the reason or the cause for things to happen and step by step resolving the problem – the four Noble Truths) (SN 55.5).

Right Thinking is considered as the most superior in practicing the Dharma. It is like the steering wheel that leads the practitioner on track in practicing the Dharma. In Chapter Two mentioned above, the [Āgama Saṅkhepa] (A Short Treatise of the Āgamas/Nikāya); Section IX provides valuable information with reference to the discourses in the Āgamas (Nikāyas) in regarding to Right Thinking.

1) Right Thinking –
    1. The Right Thinking of the Four Fruitions (SN 55.4~5)
    2. The Right Thinking in the Noble Eightfold Path (MN 117)

2) Various levels of Right Thinking
    1. Function of differentiation of wholesome from

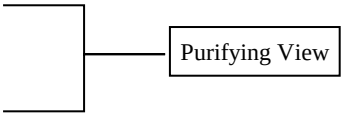
unwholesome; develop the shameful mind, cut off from evil actions, practice virtue.

2. Listening to the Righteous Dhamma, start Right Thinking, practice in accordance to the Dhamma (SN 55.4~5).
3. Accept and practice the Righteous Dhamma, contemplate and comprehend the meaning, examine, and forbearing, develop intention (MN 70).
4. Base on Right Thinking (thinking in accordance with principle) to develop Right View, Right Intention … Noble Eightfold Paths
5. Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood…. (MN 117).
6. The factor of Mindfulness – the Seven Factors of Enlightenment
7. Staying solitude and concentrate in the practice of meditation to develop Right Thinking (SN 12.10, 53~54).

3) Based on Right Thinking and Right Effort to reach the highest liberation (SN 4.4)

4) What is Right Thinking?
   1. Listen carefully, be attentive and think clearly (SN 22.7).
   2. Concentrate and focus in developing Right Thinking (SN 22.63).
   3. Think skillfully with a calm and quiet mind and examine the reality (SN 22.5).
   4. Train and tame the mind to balance concentration and insight so that one complements the other (AN 4.170).
   5. Examine and observation

5) Connection to Right Thinking
   1. With the five aggregates
   2. With the sense bases
   3. With the Realms
   4. With the roots



5. With the Truths
6. With the Dependent Origination

Overcoming doubt

7. With the teaching of Impermanence
8. With the teaching of Suffering
9. With the teaching Non-self

Develop Right Thinking, practice purified actions, purification of

10. With the three baskets
    (Teaching, principle, actions, and effects)

6) Abandon the thought of worldly matter and think about the Four Noble Truths (SN 44.9, SN 33.1, SN 44.1).
   1. Not to think about the worldly matter (for the renounced disciples) (SN 56.41).
   2. The Fourteen Irrelevant Questions (SN 56.8).
   3. Four inconsiderable matters (AN 4.77).

7) Four types of Good disciples (sons) in accordance with Right Thinking (AN 4.113).

8) Right Intention = Right Thinking
   1. Worldly Right Intention (MN 117).
   2. Supra-mundane Right Intention (MN 117).
   3. Right Intention – the three-wholesome thinking – (DN 33).
      (1) Three wholesome awareness
      (2) Three wholesome perception
      (3) Three wholesome realms

9) Right Intention – the three types of wholesome intentions – (SN 14.12).

10) The cause and effects of Right Thinking (SN 46.16).

With Right Thinking, the practitioner truly understands the profoundness of the Dharma and the mind would be purified. When the mind is purified, a stronger Faith will be developed. This is the Faith with Tolerance.

The more confidence a practitioner has on the Dharma, the deeper he would want to penetrate into teaching. At this point, the practitioner would quest for not only the concepts but also for practice accordingly.

<u>At the Fourth stage</u>:

Relying on the Righteous Dharma he learned, as the practitioner's Faith becomes stronger; the wholesome desire for accepting and practicing the Dharma also becomes firmer.

In the process of practicing in accordance with Righteous Dharma, the practitioner's mind begins to be free from taints and wisdom will surface; and at the same time Faith becomes purified. The procedures are as follows:

1. Paying careful attention – accepting – observe and understand the profound meaning – practice accordingly – (AN 8.25).
2. From observation and understanding then accept the teaching (MN 22).

Accept and Practice the Righteous Dharmas –

1. Accept and undertake all Dhamma (AN 6.43).
2. Accept and undertake the Vinaya (AN 9.3).
3. Accept and undertake the teaching of Samadhi (No reference in Pali canon).
4. Accept and undertake the teaching of the seven virtuous actions (SN 11.11, 11.21)
    a. Respect and take care of the parents;
    b. Truly respect the teachers;
    c. Kind and soft-hearted;
    d. Speaking kind, beneficial words;
    e. No words that creating conflict;
    f. Not being stingy, be generous and not being greedy;
    g. Avoid being ill-willed and eradicate aversion.

5. Accept, recite, announce, and spread the Dhamma.
6. Accept the Four Noble Truths as taught by the Buddha (AN 56.15).
7. Accept as it is, not depart from, not anything different from, truthful, as the fact, analyze, not the opposition – the Four Noble Truths (SN 56.20).
8. For those who has doubt and not accept the Four Noble Truths, they are not at the level yet (SN 56.16; MN 121).

Practicing in accordance to the Dharma

1. Understanding the meaning, accept the teaching, learn, and recite, think and consider then accept the teaching … establish faith and confidence
2. Faith/Confidence leads to Right Intention/Right Thinking – guarding the sense doors, observe and protect the precepts – (AN 7.65)
3. Right Intention/thinking leads to applying efforts to overcome the five hindrances, effort to practice the seven factors – (SN 46.29, 46.49)
4. Right Intention/thinking – consider and understand the meaning then accept the teaching to develop penetrating knowledge (wisdom) on the twelve links of dependent origination – (SN 12.10, 12.53~54)

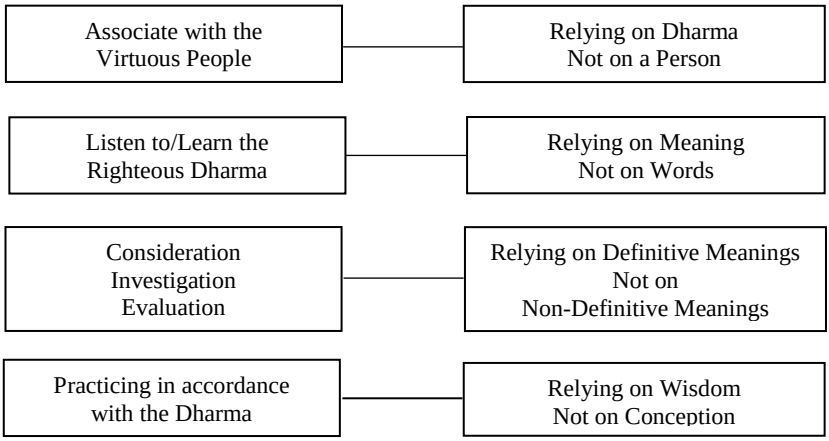
After completing the entire process, the practitioner enters the Stream of Liberation – becoming a Stream Enterer.

The Process **~**

- *Listening and Learning the Dharma*
- *With Right View and Right Intention*
- *Observing the Five Precepts*
- *Right Speech*
- *Right Action*
- *Right Livelihood*

- *With Right Effort and Energy*
- *Develop Right Mindfulness*
- *Develop Right Concentration*

~ Develop Wisdom and Transcend to Supra Mundane Right View and Right Intention



By repeating the process, the practitioner will advance to the next level of attainment. The next round will start with the Purified Faith and wisdom developed from the first round and repeating the entire process. Again, the third round advances even deeper and subtler, penetrating into the Dharma until all fetters are totally eradicated and there is no more learning. The practitioner attains complete freedom and becomes an Arahat.

Conclusion **~**

In addition to confidence, devotion and belief, another aspect of Faith is defined as Mind Clarity. According to *Abhidharma*, it is one of the ten virtuous mental factors. When a person has faith, the mind becomes "clear, serene, and undisturbed," and the muddy defilements in the mind will clear up. According to the Buddha's

teachings, faith should be developed through learning, understanding, observing, and experiencing the reality; and in the process of doing so, wisdom will arise.

Only through learning, observation, investigation, righteous thinking, self-experience (practice), and wisdom, can one develop firm and purified Faith. Hence, in Buddhism, faith not only has to be reasoned and rooted in understanding, but also needs to be based firmly on practice and experience. This kind of faith will have a solid foundation which will not be shaken easily.

"If religion means only a system of faith and worship then this interpretation does not apply to Buddhism" (Dhammapada 13). Therefore, in Buddhism, Faith is not only the initial step onto the path of liberation, it is required on each step of the path. Purified Faith is a key to success and help practitioners to reach the final goal of liberation.

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Lotus flowers blooming in MABA's lake.
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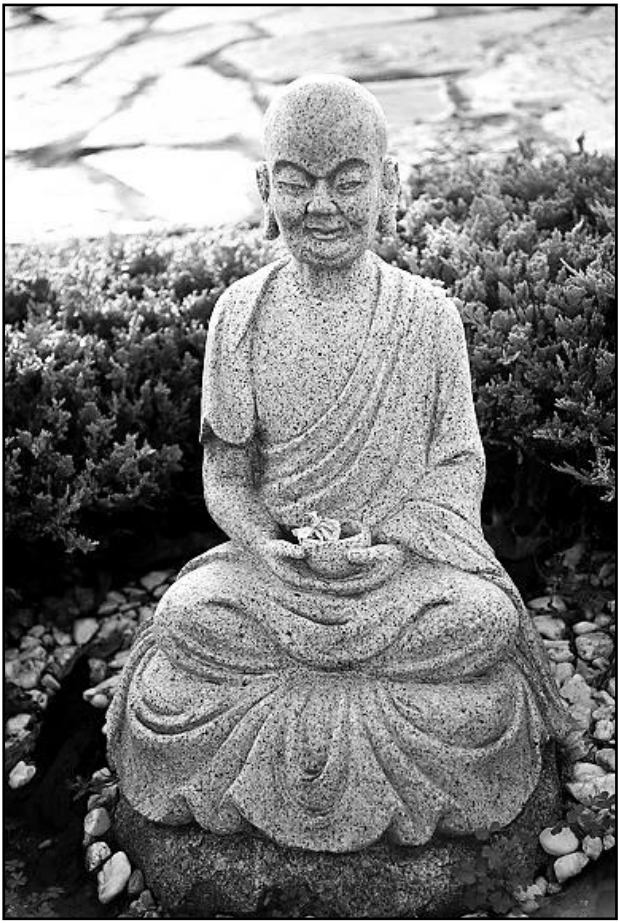

One of the many arahat sculptures in the gardens at MABA

Research Paper

題目：初期《三論宗》的三寶觀在兩晉南北朝時代的社會地位

Xiǎnzhì Katty Choi

一．引言

《三論宗》是依鳩摩羅什所譯，龍樹菩薩所著之 《中論》，《十二門論》，與龍樹弟子提婆所著的 《百論》而得名，但在鳩摩羅什時代並沒有《三論宗》的派別意義(1)。《中論》和《十二門論》的作者龍樹菩薩是中觀學說的始創人，他所著的二論及提婆的《百論》在中國被視爲最基本的中觀學派著作，所以中觀學派又統稱為《三論宗》(2)。

以《中論》為最基要的中觀學說是印度大乘佛教般若思想的延展(3)，繼承了大乘《般若經》主要思想：［菩薩的中道妙觀］和［緣起性空］(4)。（如《中觀論頌》的《中論・觀四諦品》有：眾因緣生法，我說即是空，亦為是假名，亦是中道義，未曾有一法，不從因緣生，是故一切法，無不是空者）(5)。中觀思想由鳩摩羅什譯成漢文在中國流通的時期正值佛教在中國最頂盛的兩晉南北朝時代。《三論宗》思想的建立始於被羅什譽為［秦人解空第一］的弟子：僧肇。

《三論宗》在中國佛學史上的發展和傳承可分爲以下幾個時段：

一． 建立期 － 羅什/僧肇（東晉/姚秦時期 公元 401-413）。

二． 衰微期 － 羅什/僧肇逝世至攝山僧朗（齊、梁/北魏時期約 420-550）(6)。

三． 復興期 － 攝山僧朗至僧詮（齊、梁/北魏至北周時期約 550-580）(7)。

四． 頂盛期 － 吉藏（隋朝時期約 591-609）(8)。

五． 沒落期 － 吉藏晚年以後（隋末、唐初後）(9)[(1)]

由建立至沒落，《三論宗》經歷了近兩百多年的歷史。其中，以［建立期］的思想最爲重要，因為這個時期的思想起了承先（繼承龍樹菩薩的中觀學說）啓後（使［般若之學］於後世得以正解(10) ）的作用。本文將著重於探究初期《三論宗》的三寶觀在兩晉南北朝時代的地位。

二．歷史和文化背景

要了解《三論宗》的三寶觀與社會的關係就必須先了解當代的政治、文化和思想背景。

兩晉南北朝時代的中國正處於五胡十六國的亂世。自西晉建國以來，社會上政治動蕩、漢胡民族相爭、以致戰事頻繁。西晉滅後，東晉南遷，偏安於建業（今南京），而在北方的長安也因後秦姚興勵精圖治得以安享二十餘年的太平盛世(11)。李世傑在《漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教思想史》一書中形容這時期有三個特質 ：第一是漢胡民族的接觸，二是新從西域來的佛教文化和舊有的儒道文化的接觸，第三是［空］與［有］的接觸(12)。鳩摩羅什便是在姚秦時被秦王姚興請到長安的逍遙園譯經。

由於政治局勢的不穩定，魏晉時期的知識分子都感到得失、生死的無常， 加上漢末的儒學變質，因而［放棄繁瑣的訓詁之學，轉治周易、老子、莊子］了(13)。於是，三玄之學 —《周易》、《老子》、《莊子》極為盛行而成爲了當時的顯學。當印度早期般若思想的談［空］、［無所取］、［本無］等傳入中國即與三玄學［形而上學］的思想本質契合而廣爲當代學者所接受(14)。當時佛教界的一些［高僧］也習染了魏晉時的玄學風氣(15)。然而［般若甚深］，尤其是［緣起］、［性空］兩大義理更為難以通達，（《阿含經》說：［十二緣起，甚深甚深，難見難了，難可通達］,而［緣起之寂滅性，更難了知，更難通達］）(16)， 故而出現了［兩晉般若學］的［六家七宗］各說各法，試圖詮釋［般若學］。［六家七宗］為(17)：

1。本無(代表人物—道安)
本無異(代表人物—竺法琛,竺法汰)、(二宗合為一家成本無家)；
2。即色(代表人物—支度林)；
3。識含(代表人物—于法開，于法威，何默)；
4。幻化(代表人物—道壹)；
5。心無(代表人物—支愍度，竺法琛，道蘊，桓玄，劉遺民)；
6。緣會(代表人物—于道邃)。

有感於各宗各派對般若思想眾說紛紜，又因［去聖久遠，文義舛難，先舊所解，時有乖謬］(18)，羅什的年輕弟子，有［解空第一］之譽的僧肇便著了<般若無知論>，以正時乖(19)。繼而又著作<不真空論>、<物不遷移論>以及<涅槃無名論>，合共四論成爲著

名的《肇論》。（僧肇生平事跡及《肇論》可參考諸家註疏及書籍）。初期《三論宗》的學說其實就是僧肇的佛教思想。集《三論宗》學說於大成的吉藏亦說:［若肇公名肇，可謂玄宗之始］(20)。 因之，僧肇的三寶觀也代表著《三論宗》的三寶觀。

三．僧肇之三寶觀

甲． 佛寶

從以下數例可畧探僧肇對佛寶的看法：

1． 佛的德行是完善無瑕。在《注維摩詰經》中，僧肇云：［至人空洞無象］(21)，即是說［聖人（佛）已達造境，亦即與大道同體，與萬物俱化之理想人格］(22)。
2． 佛是慈悲無限，為度化眾生而用種種不同方法，或隱法身或顯化身來救渡眾生。［至人謀無方，隱顯殊迹，故迭為修短應物之情耳］(23)。
3． 佛的真身以正法為體是［恬淡寂泊，無數無爲，豈容憂畏喜厭於其間］不會被憂畏喜厭所牽纏(24)。
4． 佛的智慧是至高無上，能知一切法而又能對一切法無染無執。［智周萬物而無照，權積眾德而無功，冥漠無爲而所不為，此不思議之極也］(25)。［至人冥真體寂，空虛其壞，雖復萬法並照，而心未嘗有］(26)。
5． 佛的境界是圓融無礙，平等而沒有差別的。［美惡齊觀，覆逆常順，和光塵勞，愈晦愈明，斯可謂通達無礙，平等佛道也］(27)。

乙． 法寶

僧肇對法寶的看法都顯現在他的著作中。他對中觀的 ［空］、 ［般若］、［緣起］、［真俗二諦］等諸法不但深深體會，明明了了，而且能夠運用他流暢的文筆，集儒道兩家學問而構成了［佛典漢化］的特點。僧肇著了《般若無知論》後呈給羅什看，羅什讀

後，讚嘆道：［吾解不謝子，辭當相挹］(28)。（意思是:我對般若的了解不遜於你，但文辭卻不及你好）。〈般若無知論〉、〈不真空論〉、〈物不遷移論〉以及〈涅槃無名論〉、是爲著名的《肇論》。亦是僧肇對佛法的詮釋，現試作說明如下：

1. 〈般若無知論〉— 說明了般若智是沒有執取形相之知，但卻肯定了［無形相、無概念、無執取、照而常寂、寂而常照、默耀韜光、虛心玄鑒、閉智塞聰、獨覺冥冥之知］(29)。
2. 〈不真空論〉— 根據李潤生老師的《僧肇》一書，［不真空］包括兩重意義：一是就俗諦來說［世法不真，不真故空］，二是就真諦來說［般若清淨，清淨即空］(30)。
3. 〈物不遷移論〉— 僧肇以［動］、［靜］為主、再進入［時］、［空］以及［因果］的現象。換言之是由俗諦的現象學來闡釋真諦，再而引進中觀不落二邊的中道思想(31)。
4. 〈涅槃無名論〉— 僧肇在這篇論著中引用多部經典，如：《放光》、《賢劫》、《成具》、《禪經》等等來闡明［涅槃無始無終，湛若空虛］，而涅槃是無形無相，不是言語名相所能形容的。僧肇注《維摩詰經》亦有解說道：［欲言在生死，生死不能汚；欲言在涅槃，而不復滅度。是以處中道而行者，非在生死，非住涅槃］(32)。

丙. 僧寶

自漢代開闢了與西域通商的絲綢之路以來，中國與西域各國文化交流不斷，到了兩晉南北朝時代，除了佛經從印度的傳入，西僧東來更是普遍。以至一時人才濟濟，同時也培育出不少高僧大德。鳩摩羅什和幾位很有成就的弟子都是在這個大時代的著名人物。

初期《三論宗》最具代表性的僧寶是羅什和僧肇。從後來學者對他們的評 論，可以了解他們在當代和現代社會的地位及影響。

1. 鳩摩羅什

李潤生在《僧肇》一書中評說：［在中國佛教史上，羅什的譯經，無論在規模的宏偉，過程的嚴格，態度的認真，卷帙的繁博，影響的深遠，乃至輔翼人材的鼎盛，都可說是前無古人的］(33)。

人材之鼎盛：

僧佑的《羅什傳》裏紀錄說：［四方義學沙門不遠萬里，明德秀拔者，才、暢二公；乃至道恒、僧標、僧叡、僧敦、僧弼、僧肇等三千餘僧，稟受精研，務窮幽旨］(34)。

譯經之嚴緊及態度之認真：

僧肇在《維摩詰經序》中說：：［…時手執胡文，口自宣譯，道俗虔虔，一言三復，陶冶精求，務存聖意…］(35) 。呂澂在中國佛學思想概論引《高僧傳》［…如晚年譯出之《十住經》…羅什因對它不熟悉…一個多月都未敢動筆，直到把他老師佛陀耶舍請來商量過了，弄清楚義理，方才翻譯］(36)。

羅什不但治學態度認真，而且為人寬容謙虛。例如他的弟子僧叡就曾直率地指出他翻譯有不足之處(37)。羅什又曾謙虛地承認自己的文辭比不上僧肇：［吾解不謝子，辭當相挹］(38)。

2. 僧肇

有感於［去聖久遠，文義舛難，先舊所解，時有乖謬］(39)。才情橫溢，智辯無礙的僧肇著作了著名的［肇論］，使般若思想不至被曲解。：［僧肇對本無、即色、心無三家的批判以及他宣揚的佛教哲學…堅持了大乘空宗立場、觀點和方法…直接從經綸中了解佛教的本來思想，結束了對佛教的生吞活剝，牽強附會，開始了正式傳播…開創了印度佛教在中國流傳和發展的新局面。］(40)。僧肇功不可沒。

羅什去世後為了對老師懷念僧肇寫了《鳩摩羅什法師誄》及著作了<涅槃無名論>這種對師長尊

敬的情操是直得敬佩和學習的。生長在長期戰亂的社會，［僧肇在短短的三十多年的生命歷程中，完成了自己的翻譯與著作的文化 使命］(41)。作為一位佛弟子，僧肇實在是克盡責任，不愧為佛教的僧寶。

四．初期《三論宗》的三寶觀在當代的社會地位

甲． 佛寶

兩晉南北朝時代之初期，玄學是中國的主流學說。研究老、莊思想成爲社會風氣。佛寶在當時學術界（知識分子）以及政治界（帝王朝廷）是相等於老子或孔子之［聖人］或［至人］的地位。而在一般民間，仍然擺脫不了漢末黃老式的迷信：［佛者…恍惚邊化…能大能小，能圓能方，能隱能彰，…在汚不染，在禍無殃，欲飛則飛，坐則揚光，故號為佛也。］(42)。

龍樹菩薩的論典及大乘經典傳入，由鳩摩羅什譯成漢文，開啓了社會上對佛學有了新的認識。僧肇的《肇論》破斥了［六家七宗］使佛學擺脫了依附玄學，佛寶的［智慧、慈悲的德行，佛境的圓融無礙，佛法身的恬淡寂泊］(43)才開始被社會認識和認同。因此，《三論宗》的佛寶觀不但對佛教在當代貢獻至大，對佛寶在中國也建立了大乘佛法的悲智圓融的至高無上地位。同時，民間對佛寶的［神化］在僧肇［經論思想正式傳播］(44)下，亦相對減少了。

乙． 法寶

佛學思想在兩晉南北朝時代可謂［百家爭鳴］的時代。有慧遠的念佛，有［六家七宗］的本無、即色、識含、幻化、心無、緣會等等。僧肇的<般若無知論>破斥［六家七宗］，得 到廬山隱士劉遺民讚嘆道：［不意方袍，復有平叔］(45)，連南方名僧慧遠也讚嘆道：［未嘗有也］(46)。可見僧肇的佛學思想是得到有識之士的認同。

《三論宗》的中觀思想和僧肇的《肇論》在當代的確是掀起社會上對［般若學說］爭議紛紜的浪潮（從僧肇和劉遺民書函往來對答的<答劉遺民書>，可以了

解其中議題內容）。般若思想在僧肇的反復辯證下終於成爲當代的佛教主流思想之一。

可惜的是［般若甚深］，［緣起］、［性空］義理難解，難證，《三論宗》的般若思想只盛行於學術界及部分的當權者，也只有利根之人才能了解。一般的平民百姓則得益不多。羅什去世，僧肇英年早逝，加上最大的支持者秦王姚興也死了，《三論宗》［般若性空］的法寶觀在社會上的地位也被《成實論》思想取代了。

丙．僧寶

鳩摩羅什在中國佛教史上的重要性是不可置疑的。羅什的僧團在當時可謂盛況空前。［（羅什）弘始八年於草堂寺，三千學士最後出此一品，梵本…譯訖，融、影等三百人一時受菩薩戒…］(47)。從羅什的僧團培養出來的高僧大德亦是多不勝數。僧寶在當代社會上不但受人尊敬而且也受朝廷的尊重和保護。因此，僧人可以專心一志研究和翻譯經典。

認真，精進，對真理契而不捨，努力鑽研是羅什的僧團的特性。僧肇就是其中的表表者。

五．總結

《三論宗》是依龍樹菩薩的《中論》為中心思想，而《中論》又是印度大乘佛法［般若性空，緣起性空］思想的延展。故而，《三論宗》又被稱爲大乘佛教的［空宗］(48)。

初期《三論宗》的三寶在兩晉南北朝時代受到社會上認同和尊敬，原因有三點：

一．龍樹菩薩的中觀思想的傳入，及鳩摩羅什的翻譯，使［般若性空］ 的思想得以流傳。

二．僧肇對［空］、［緣起］思想的更正及開創佛法漢化使人們對《三論宗》思想有正確的認識。

三．統治者的護法使僧團可以專心一志研究和翻譯經典的同時， 也可以起領導作用。

《三論宗》的思想不但在兩晉南北朝時代佔了很重要的地位，對後來的中國大乘佛教影響至深。《三論宗》對佛、法、僧持有的觀念和態度可以作爲世人的模範。

註釋

（1） 印順法師，《佛法是救世之光》頁 125〈三論宗風簡說〉。
（2） 參閱廖明活，《中國佛教思想史教學講義》〈中觀教學的形成和傳〉入 —— 從僧肇的教學看早期中國中觀思想頁 35。
（3） 同上。
（4） 參閱印順法師，《中觀論頌講記》頁 6-12。
（5） 《中論》卷四，《大正藏》三十　卷，頁 33 中。
（6） 參閱楊惠南，《吉藏》頁 5-49。
（7） 同上（6）。
（8） 同上（6）。
（9） 同上（6）。
（10） 參閱李潤生，《僧肇》頁 234-235。
（11） 參閱李潤生，《僧肇》頁 64-69。
（12） 李世傑，《漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教思想史》頁 58-59。
（13） 劉貴傑，《僧肇思想研究》頁 16。
（14） 參閱李潤生，《僧肇》頁 80。
（15） 參閱李潤生，《僧肇》頁 89。
（16） 印順法師，《中觀論頌講記》頁 9。
（17） 參閱李潤生，《僧肇》頁 80。
（18） 李潤生，《僧肇》頁 28 引慧皎《高僧傳》《大正藏》五十二，365。
（19） 參閱李潤生，《僧肇》頁 103。
（20） 李潤生，《僧肇》頁 235 引《大正藏》四十二，232。
（21） 劉貴傑，《僧肇思想研究》頁 46 引《注維摩詰經》，《大正藏》三十八，334 中。
（22） 參閱劉貴傑，《僧肇思想研究》頁 46。
（23） 劉貴傑，《僧肇思想研究》頁 46 引《注維摩詰經》，《大正藏》三十八，370 下。
（24） 劉貴傑，《僧肇思想研究》頁 47 引《注維摩詰經》，《大正藏》三十八，412 上。

（25） 劉貴傑，《僧肇思想研究》頁 46 引《注維摩詰經》，《大正藏》三十八，382 中。
（26） 劉貴傑，《僧肇思想研究》頁 46 引《注維摩詰經》，《大正藏》三十八，333 上。
（27） 劉貴傑，《僧肇思想研究》頁 46 引《注維摩詰經》，《大正藏》三十八，390 下。
（28） 洪修平，《十大名僧》之<僧肇>頁 98。
（29） 參閱李潤生，《僧肇》頁 107。
（30） 參閱李潤生，《僧肇》頁 133。
（31） 參閱李潤生，《僧肇》頁 161。
（32） 參閱李潤生，《僧肇》頁 1204-212。
（33） 李潤生，《僧肇》頁 25。
（34） 李潤生，《僧肇》頁 26 引《出三藏記集》卷十四《大正藏》五十五，101。
（35） 呂澂《中國佛學思想概論》頁 98。
（36） 同上（35）。
（37） 呂澂《中國佛學思想概論》頁 100。
（38） 洪修平，《十大名僧》之<僧肇>頁 98。
（39） 李潤生，《僧肇》頁 28 引慧皎《高僧傳》《大正藏》五十二，365。
（40） 洪修平，《中國佛教學術論典 19 》之〈論僧肇哲學〉頁 423。
（41） 參閱李潤生，《僧肇》頁 69。
（42） 洪修平，《中國佛教學術論典 19 》之〈論僧肇哲學〉頁 337。
（43） 見本文三 .甲. 之〈僧肇之三寶觀—佛寶〉。
（44） 參閱洪修平，《中國佛教學術論典 19 》之〈論僧肇哲學（第三章〉頁 423-440。
（45） 李潤生，《僧肇》頁 27 注解（41）：[方袍是指袈裟]（意寓僧肇），[平叔是何晏的別字；何晏著《論語集解》，使《論語》的思想顯明於世。僧肇著〈般若無知論〉，亦使般若真義得以顯明於中土。
（46） 李潤生，《僧肇》頁 28。
（47） 李潤生，《僧肇》頁 40 引《大正藏》五十五，252。
（48） 李勇，《中國佛教學術論典 21 》之〈三論宗佛學思想研究〉頁 17。

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Practice of Mindfulness

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Senior Lay Dharma Teacher

Having started to come to MABA around the turn of the century, the cultivation of a strong interest in Buddhism goes back to my early 20s as a student at Washington University in St. Louis. The 1960s was a period of great social unrest. Many of us were active in Civil Rights marches as well as in other causes at the time. Vietnam, the political turmoil of the Nixon years, and the Women's Movement for equality gave us both challenges and opportunities to express our views. However, the social divides also created a generation gap and struggles to maintain a positive support system. This was far from a peaceful time. Clear in my memory was seeing Buddhist monks protesting violence. My first memory of hearing the word 'Buddhism' was watching on TV the now famous self-immolation of Thich Quang Duc, who set himself on fire to protest the Vietnamese War. I had just turned 16. Later I learned that the monks were vegetarian, as were the people practicing yoga as a spiritual and meditative discipline. The choice to give up eating meat made total sense as a means of being a more peaceful person.

At that time, a good friend encouraged several of us to take a course in Chinese philosophy, later learning meditation under the guidance of professor Ho Kuang-chung. Gradually my mind, which had been subject to the political distress and to relationship difficulties, started to calm down and become clearer. Meditation practice became to be so beneficial that I thought about becoming a Chinese philosophy professor. As fate would have it, I was not proficient in learning languages (to earn a PhD, one must learn at least two Asian languages), and as a result, the choice of being a psychotherapist appeared more attainable.

Guānyīn became a guiding force, as the Guānyīn mind-state is about listening to the sounds of suffering in the world with compassion. With this inspiration, by the early 1980s I was fortunate to get in on the start of cognitive behavioral therapy, which incorporated relaxation training. Having been raised by a scientific father, who had synthesized folic acid in the mid-1940s, an evidence-based approach felt right when it came to helping people recover from anxiety and depression. When the therapy world found mindfulness to be an acceptable treatment method, those who had been practicing meditation for many years found themselves at the forefront of the psychology field.

Teaching at Washington University in St. Louis was also very rewarding. When the Chinese students were unable to have their parents come to graduation due to the SARS epidemic in 2003, a number of professors volunteered to stand in for their family members and support them. This is how I received the name, 叔叔 Shūshu, meaning uncle. After teaching cognitive behavioral therapy to graduate students for over 17 years, the next step was to lecture around the country on cognitive therapy and mindfulness practices.

I remember clearly my first few times at MABA. Several friends from the Tibetan Buddhist community drove out together for Vesak Day in May 2001. Immediately I felt that I had returned home. Having looked for a Chinese Buddhist Sangha for several years, seeing the monastics and the grounds, there was a deep sense of peace. It wasn’t long before I was attending nearly every Sunday.

Ven. Kōngshí quickly became the person who I looked to for guidance. Whenever I had questions, she would patiently either provide an answer or a resource. Ven. Kōngzhèng and Ven. Kōnghuàn also were very supportive. It took a little while before I was ready to talk to Master Jìrú. Instead of talking, I simply observed him. I noticed how he responded to others, how he dealt with difficulties, and how he always was humble and caring. It took three years before I first approached him with a question about the meaning of the verses at the Guānyīn Pavilion. Master mentioned the importance of 轉意, "turning around your thinking," and 大慈大悲, "great loving kindness and great compassion." Suddenly, it felt like all that I had been doing throughout my life had finally come into focus. This was the place I was going to meditate, study, and transform my mind.

At MABA, my moniker is Xiǎnkuān Don Shūshu. Xiǎnkuān 顯寬 is my Dharma name. Xiǎn 顯 means to express clearly and kuān 寬 means to see things from a wide perspective. This is a bit ironic because of my eye problems which began in 1996. Between 2002 and 2015 these old eyes experienced being legally blind four times. In a way, this was a graduation present: although eyesight was compromised, the mind remained calm and clear. This was the greatest proof that mindfulness practice works! Gratefully, a wonderful retina doctor managed each time to restore sight to one eye, allowing the restoration of driving and reading under most good lighting conditions.

I have benefited greatly from all the guidance at MABA, first from Ven. Kōngshí, who helped correct some of my ego-based habits. Ven. Master Jìrú provided another level to understanding and practicing mindfulness. More recently, Ven. Kōngyán has provided further instruction in Chinese Buddhism. I have also learned a great deal from Xiǎnzhì Katty and many of the other members of the MABA community too numerous to mention. Taking the Bodhisattva Vows has continued to encourage and inspire my involvement in the activities at MABA and the community-at-large. Studying the 52 Bodhisattva Stages has inspired me to "care deeply without attachment."

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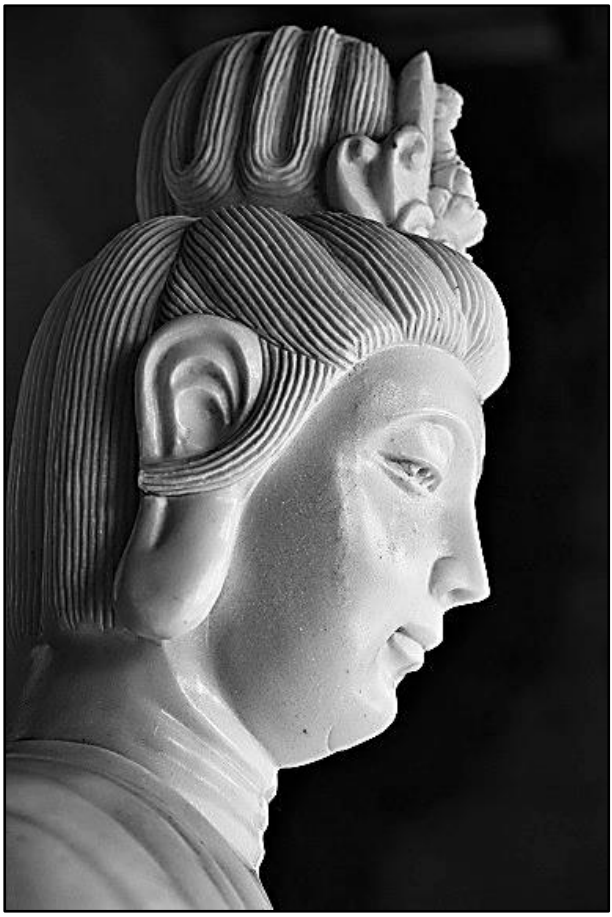

Close up of the Guānyīn sculpture at Guānyīn Pavilion

What Is the Cause of All This Suffering?
Xiǎnkuān Don Shūshu 顯寬叔叔

Sāriputta, one of the main disciples of the Buddha, states in MN 141 *Saccavibhaṅga Sūtta*: An Analysis of the Truths:

"Now what, friends, is the noble truth of stress?
Birth is stressful,
Aging is stressful,
Death is stressful;
Sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair are stressful;
Association with the unloved is stressful;
Separation from the loved is stressful;
Not getting what is wanted is stressful.
In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful.

"And what, friends, is the noble truth of the origination of stress? The craving that makes for further becoming – accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there – i.e., craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming. This is called the noble truth of the origination of stress.[1]"

Within the context of the Four Noble Truths, *cattāri ariya-saccāni*, 四諦 sìdì, once we realize that life consists of many types of suffering, we seek to understand the cause of distress, the escape from, and the path leading to the liberation from suffering. We ask the question: "What is the cause of all these types of stress and suffering?" Twenty-five hundred years ago, the Buddha set out to find the answer, leaving behind a life of luxury. It took him six years doing various rigorous practices with limited success. Finally, he decided to give up the extreme of asceticism to practice the Middle Way approach. He sat down under the Bodhi tree and for seven days he entered a deep awareness of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, (*paticcasamuppāda* in Pali; *pratītyasamutpāda* in Sanskrit[2]; 緣起 *yuánqǐ* in Chinese). It was through this awareness

that the Buddha discovered the Second Noble Truth, the cause of suffering, *Dukkha Samudaya*.

A few errors are commonly made when trying to understand the Second Noble Truth of the cause of suffering. First, many people skip the word *samudaya* altogether and go directly to *taṇhā.* Second, many mistranslate *taṇhā* to mean 'desire.' As a result, when asked what the Buddha said the cause of suffering is, they mistakenly say that the cause is desire. To clearly know the meaning of the cause of suffering, we need to correctly understand the Pāli terms of both *samudaya* and *taṇhā*. Also, it would be good to understand 'desire' in the Buddhist context.

The first point is to clear up any confusion about craving. The meaning of *taṇhā* refers to a craving for something. When the mind craves, it does so because it believes that by attaining the object of craving, happiness will be the result. In simple terms, we crave what we think will make us happy. We do not see that: 1) the object of craving is itself incapable of bringing happiness, 2) we must exert energy to keep the object, and 3) we will eventually lose the object due to impermanence. We do not see these things because of a lack of wisdom. This lack of awareness is called ignorance *avijjā (*Sanskrit: *avidya),* 無明 wú míng. Literally, 無明 wú míng means 'no light.' This 'no light' craving is the root cause of suffering. *Taṇhā* is rooted in *avijjā*. Craving, *taṇhā,* is the 8th link in the chain of Dependent Origination which begins with ignorance, *avijjā*.

The second point is to return to the original meaning of the cause of suffering, *Dukkha samudaya,* 苦集 kǔjí. *Samudaya* means the accumulation or aggregation of suffering, *dukkha*. The character 集 jí is a picture of a flock of birds, 隹 zhuī, in a tree, 木 mù. Hence, the meaning is of a gathering or accumulation. The word *samudaya* from the Pāli is also transliterated as 三牟提耶 sānmóutíyé.

For those who are uninstructed in the Eightfold Path, accumulation of worldly pleasures is seen as something quite desirable. Many foolishly believe that accumulating power, wealth, and fame will lead to happiness. At some point in life, the pointlessness of this accumulation may occur to them. They may

realize that instead of accumulating the happiness from pleasure, they are accumulating more and more distress and suffering – as in the eight types of suffering listed by Sāriputta above. The last of the eight types, the five clinging-aggregates, 五蘊 wǔyùn, refers to the five component of what we are made up of: 1) form, 2) feeling, 3) perception/conception, 4) mental formations, 5) consciousness. These accumulations are part and parcel of our karma, which in turn creates our moment-to-moment existence, or in another way of understanding, it is our way of coping with our existence. Each choice we make in every moment in our lives creates who we are as a person. You can choose to continue reading here, for example, or you can choose to go to the casino to gamble. This intentional choice impacts your habitual patterns and your consciousness. Sometimes it is difficult to see this. Wisdom is often very subtle.

The third point is to clear up any possible mix-up about the word 'accumulation' in Buddhism. For those versed in the Tibetan *Lam Rim* texts, there is a possibility of confusion regarding the term 'accumulation' as related to the Mahāyāna stages of the path. In the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, there is a list of five stages of cultivating the Yogâcāra path (*saṃbhāra-mārga*, 唯識修道五位 wéishí xiūdào wǔwèi). The first stage, 資糧位 zīliáng wèi, has been translated as 'the stage of accumulation.' However, 'preparation' is a more accurate rendering from the Chinese. The first two characters, 資糧 zīliáng, both separately and together mean 'possession-preparation,' as in preparing what we need for a journey. Therefore, in the Chinese texts, the first stage is given as the stage of preparation. In this stage, a person focuses on cultivating positive attitudes, words, and deeds in order to accumulate merit and virtue. However, the Mahāyāna practitioner does not wish to put away or hoard any accumulated karma, but instead he/she wishes to share this merit with all beings. In this way, the person enters the initial bodhisattva practices of developing bodhicitta (compassionate, awakened mind), in which one arouses the mind. 發心 fāxīn, to attain enlightenment, not for oneself, but for the benefit of all sentient beings. This selfless intention goes so far as to renounce even the

quest for enlightenment itself, such that all others would be liberated first.

The fourth point is to explain the relationship between accumulation, *samudaya*, and thirst, *taṇhā*. This can be illustrated in the important discourse on the "three-round, twelve-permutation knowledge and vision"[3] found in SN 56:11 *Dhammacakkappavattana Sūtta*: Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth (here with Pāli and Chinese added to emphasize connections):

"The Noble Truth of the Origin (cause) of Suffering is this: It is this craving (thirst) which produces re-becoming (rebirth) accompanied by passionate greed, and finding fresh delight now here, and now there, namely craving for sense pleasure[4], craving for existence and craving for non-existence (self-annihilation)."[5]

Suffering is caused by an accumulation resulting from *taṇhā* (Sanskrit*; tṛṣṇā*).[6] *Taṇhā* in Pāli technically means thirst. However, it is often translated too broadly as desire or attachment. Desire is a word in Buddhism with many meanings. Desire can be negative, positive, or neutral. The six common unwholesome and wholesome desires include:

	Unwholesome Desires	Wholesome Desires
1	Craving selfishly: *Taṇhā or Tṛṣṇā,* 愛 ài; Self-love 自愛 zì ài	Selflessness 無私 wúsī; Equanimity 捨 shě
2	Greediness: *Rāga,* 貪 tān	Non-craving 無貪 (wú tān), with the characteristic of no attachment 無染著 (wú zhuó)[7] Non-attachment 無着[8] Loving Kindness and Compassion, *mettā-karunā*, 慈悲 cíbēi

3	Sense-Based pleasure seeking: *Kāma*, 六欲 liùyù	Craving the right Dharma 善法欲 shàn fǎ yù Seeking to cultivate wholesome factors Bodhi vow; wholesome vow/wish for attaining the enlightenment, 菩提願 pú tí yuan Wondrous Observing Cognition, *pratyavekṣa-jñāna*, 妙觀察智 miào guānchá zhì
4	Stinginess: *Lobha,* 慳財 qiāncái, Grudgingly Stingy 慳吝 qiānlìn	Rich or bounteous gift 好施 hǎoshī[9] Generosity, *Dana/Caga*, 布施 bùshī
5	Entangling the mind in a trap: *Icchā, 結縛 jiéfú*[10]	Untangling the mind 除 縛 chú fú Arouse the mind intention to achieve enlightenment, *bodhi-citta-utpāda,* 發菩提心 fā pútí xīn
6	Leak in our energy: *Āsava*, 漏 lòu	Untainted 無漏 wúlòu Being of Benefit to All Beings 饒益行 ráoyì xíng
Neutral Desire	Object-Ascertaining Mental Factor: *Chanda,* 別境 *biéjìng*	

I remember the first time any of the monastics came to visit my office. Three persons arrived wearing their traditional grey daily outfits, and they removed their shoes – customary for them, but certainly not for any of my usual patients. Venerable Kungshih's name was transliterated from the Taiwanese Romanization[11], but in

Chinese and pinyin, it should be 空實 Kōngshí, meaning ‘Emptiness is Real.’ She spoke first for the group.

“Oh, Don Shūshu, what a beautiful office – like a museum!”

Indeed, I had been collecting Chinese art for many years, especially Guānyīn sculptures and paintings. There were also several Chinese scrolls and pieces of calligraphy on the walls. I was a bit proud of my collection, to be sure.

Turning to one particularly large piece of calligraphy, the Venerable asked, “What is that?”

Pleased that I knew the character, I replied, “It is the Chinese character 愛 ài, for love.”

“Yes, I know,” Venerable responded. “I speak Chinese.”

It was such an obvious moment that I didn’t know what to say. Of course, she spoke fluent Chinese, and knew the character and its meaning. She continued:

“Yes, it is love, but what is it doing there?”

An easy question to answer, I thought. “Oh, I love my work and I love all my patients. It is there to remind me of this feeling. The calligraphy is from a modern day Taiji teacher I knew many years ago.”

“Yes, the calligraphy is very nice,” she replied.

A few weeks later at MABA, Venerable Kōngshí said to me,

“Master would like to see you.” This was not so unusual, but her tone was more serious than usual.

With some trepidation, I made his way to Master’s sitting room and knocked before being told to enter. I bowed before Master Jìrú spoke:

“Oh, Don Shūshu, I need a chart!”

“What kind of chart do you need, Master?” I was a bit relieved that I was not in any kind of trouble.

“Oh, a chart of the Twelve Links of Dependent Co-Arising.”

“Master, what would you like the chart to look like?”

He held up a finger and traced three vertical lines. “Maybe English, Pāli, and Chinese. That would be good.”

I understood. “Yes, I can make that chart for you.”

They both nodded, smiling.

The next Sunday at MABA, I went to see Master Jìrú again in his sitting room. “Master, I have the chart for you.”

“Oh, let me see.”

“See, one column is English, then in the middle is Pāli, on the right is the Chinese and pinyin.”

12 Links of Dependent Origination ***Paṭiccasamuppāda* (*Pratītyasamutpāda)*** 緣起 yuánqǐ			
	English	***Pāli* *(Sanskrit)***	**Chinese** (pinyin)
1	Ignorance	*Avijjā (Avidya)*	無明 wú míng
2	Volitional Formations	*Saṅkhāra (Samskara)*	行 xíng
3	Consciousness	*Viññāṇa (Vijnana)*	識 shí
4	Name and Form	*Nāmarūpa*	名色 míngsè
5	Six Sense Bases	*Saḷāyatana*	六处 liùchù
6	Contact	*Phassa (Sparsa)*	触 chù
7	Feeling	*Vedanā*	受 shòu
8	Craving	*Taṇhā (Trshna)*	愛 ài, not 渴 kě
9	Clinging	*Upādāna*	取 qǔ
10	Existence	*Bhava*	有 yǒu
11	Birth	*Jāti*	生 shēng
12	Aging and Death	*Jarāmaraṇa*	老死 lǎosǐ

“Ah, very good, very good, Don Shūshu.”

“But Master, there is a mistake in the chart.” I had been waiting to show him that there was a strange anomaly in the translation.

“Oh, show me, where?”

“See link eight, the English and Pāli are correct, but the Chinese should be the character 渴 kě, meaning thirst. Yet when I looked in the texts, the Chinese was always 愛 ài, for love. It must be a mistake.”

The Master looked carefully at the chart. “Oh, Don Shūshu, no mistake, no mistake.”

Perplexed, the student asked his teacher: “Master, can you explain this?”

“Yes.”

I waited for several moments. Not getting a response, I asked again: “Master, what is the answer?”

“Ahhh.” After a longer than normal pause, the Master suddenly pointed his index finger directly at Don Shūshu. “You, Don Shūshu, you figure it out!”

I returned home to my library to research texts comparing the English, Pāli, and Chinese. In every case, where craving and *taṇhā* were mentioned, the Chinese was indeed not 渴 kě. Instead, there was always an 愛 ài – love – staring me in the face.

Contemplating it in this way, “If I were to say, ‘I love you’, the Chinese would be 我愛你 Wǒ ài nǐ. But if I were to say, ‘I love me,’ this would be 我愛我 Wǒ ài wǒ[12].”

I recognized that this 愛 ài was not a pure love for another. It was a romantic love, full of all the trappings of self-centered desire. This was the desiring love that would bring so much suffering.

Suddenly, I had a realization: “This character on the wall is the wrong character. I must change it! But wait. It is not just the character on the wall that must change. It is *this* character.” Poking myself twice with my index finger directly in the center of my chest, I reiterated firmly: “*This* character must be changed!”

Resolving with determination to replace in myself this 愛 ài with the correct characteristic, I redoubled my efforts in practice, both on

and off the cushion. Although it would take me almost four years, I did not give up.

One Sunday, he went to Venerable Kōngshí to share something important: “Venerable, I am ready to change the character 愛 ài on my wall.” Poking myself twice with my index finger directly in the center of my chest, I continued, “This character is now changed – changed 51%.”

Kōngshí Fǎshī smiled. “We will help you find a good calligrapher.”

Not long after, I commissioned a scroll with two characters only: 慈悲 cíbēi, loving kindness and compassion. The new 慈悲 scroll was hung on the wall where the other character had resided.

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[1] Regarding the cause of suffering, here the Pāli reads (also see notes 3 and 4 below):
Katamañcāvuso, dukkhasamudayo ariyasaccaṃ: yā'yaṃ taṇhā ponobhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatra tatrābhinandinī, seyyathīdaṃ: kāmataṇhā bhavataṇhā vibhavataṇhā. Idaṃ vuccatāvuso dukkhasamudayo ariyasaccaṃ.

[2] प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद is the actual Sanskrit. The standard Romanization for both the Pāli and the Sanskrit is given for the reader's convenience.

[3] The Three Round, Twelve Permutations as explained in SN 56:11 *Dhammacakkappavattana Sūtta*: Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth. This expansion of the Four Noble Truths shows the progression of each Truth from 1) hearing the knowledge of the Truth, 2) understanding the practice to accomplish integrating this Truth into one's life, and 3) the realization of the completion of fully understanding and integrating the Truth into one's life completely. The Chinese was added later when this was translated into the Saṃyuktāgama SA 379 (see example of the cause of suffering below)

Tiparivaṭṭa – Three Phases	**1st Noble Truth**	**2nd Noble Truth**	**3rd Noble Truth**	**4th Noble Truth**
1. *Saccañāṇa* 示 shì Knowledge of each Truth	Suffering Dukkha 苦聖諦	Cause of Suffering *Samudaya* 苦集 (*Taṇhā* 渴 to 愛)	Cessation of Suffering Nirodha 苦滅	Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering Marga 道苦滅道跡

2. *Kiccañāṇa* 勸 quàn Task to be accomplished	*Pariññeyya* is to be fully Understood 當復知	*Pahātabba* is to be Abandoned 當斷	*Sacchikātabba* is to be Realized 當知作證	*Bhāvetabba* is to be Developed 當修
3. *Kataññāṇa* 證 zhèng Completion	*Pariññāta* has been fully Understood 知已出	*Pahīna* has been Abandoned 斷出	*Sacchikata* has been Realized 已作證出	*Bhāvita* has been Developed 已修出

Cause of Suffering from SA 379 excerpt:
1st phase: Reveal the knowledge of the truth: This is origin of suffering 苦集.
2nd phase: Encourage to accomplish: This is origin of suffering, is to be abandoned 當斷.
3rd phase: Directly experienced: This is origin of suffering, has been understood 已斷出.

[4] This line in the Pāli reads: "*dukkhasamudayo ariyasaccaṃ: 'yāyaṃ taṇhā ponobhavikā nandirāgasahagatā*,'" In the Chinese the text for greed cravings reads as: 欲愛). See note 3 below for the complete Pāli verse.

[5] Idaṃ kho pana bhikkhave, dukkhasamudayo ariyasaccaṃ: "yāyaṃ taṇhā ponobhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatra tatrābhinandinī, seyyathīdaṃ: kāmataṇhā bhavataṇhā vibhavataṇhā". Idaṃ kho pana bhikkhave, dukkhanirodho ariyasaccaṃ: yo tassāyeva taṇhāya asesavirāganirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo.

[6] Sixteen Aspects (or Defining Activities) of the Four Noble Truths. 十六行相 shíliù xíngxiàng, is mostly a Mahayana interpretation found in a number of commentaries, including the *Yogâcārabhūmi-śāstra,* fascicle 55, 瑜伽師地論 Yúqié shīdì lùn*; Chéng wéishí lùn,* fascicle 9, 成唯識論; *Visuddhimagga, The Path of Purification*, fascicle 11, 淸淨道論 Qīngjìngdào lùn (5th century Theravadin text); *The Sutra on the Concentration of Sitting Meditation*, fascicle 2, 坐禪三昧經 Zuòchán sānmèi jīng; *Mahavibhasa Sastra,* fascicle 5, *(Abhidharma-mahā-vibhāṣā-śāstra. Treatise of the Great Commentary on the Abhidharma),* 11,79, 188, 189 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論 Āpídámó dà pípóshā lùn

This 16-part commentary gives four subheadings for each of the Truths.

1. Suffering: The first noble truth is analyzed as
    1. containing the meanings of impermanence 無常 (*anitya*),
    2. unsatisfactoriness 苦 (*duḥkha*),
    3. emptiness 空 (*śūnya*),
    4. and no-self 無我 (*anātmaka*).

2. Cause: The second noble truth contains the implications of
    1. cause of suffering 因 (*hetu*),
    2. gathering 集 (*samudaya*),
    3. continuation 生 (*prabhāva*) and
    4. conditions 緣 (*pratyaya*).
3. Cessation: The third noble truth connotes
    1. extinction of physical attachments 滅 (*nirodha*),
    2. the calming of afflictions 靜 (*śānta*),
    3. the sublimity of no discomfort 妙 (*praṇita*) and
    4. the escape from all difficult circumstances 離 (*niḥsaraṇa*).
4. Path: Within the fourth noble truth are seen
    1. the path to cessation 道 (*mārga*),
    2. accordance with the correct principle 如 (*nyāya*),
    3. activity leading to *nirvāṇa* 行 (*pratipatti*), and
    4. transcendence of life and death 出 (*nairyāṇika*).

[7] Definition in the commentary: *Extensive Mahāyāna Treatise on the Five Skandhas* 大乘廣五蘊論

[8] Non-Attachment, wúzhāo 無著, is the name of Asaṅga, one of the great Yogâcāra founders.

[9] 好施 hǎoshī sudana, meaning bountiful gift; Sudāna, 善財 Shàncái, meaning wholesome wealth, is the name of the young boy who is instructed by Mañjuśrī in the Flower Ornament Sutra, 華嚴經 Huáyán jīng, the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra.*

[10] Actually, the Wade-Giles Romanization as preferred in Taiwan should be K'ūng, not Kūng.

[11] From the SN 1.69 *Iccha Sutta*: Desire, with the Chinese from the Agama text (SA 1186–1187) of the SN 7.6 *Jata Sutta*: The Tangle.

The inner tangle
    and the outer tangle
Are both entangled
    in a tangle.
Gotama, I ask you this:
    Who can untangle this tangle?

[12] Short form of 我爱我自己 Wǒ ài wǒ zìjǐ, I love myself. Here 自己 zìjǐ, myself, is not a negative character, as in Buddhism this also refers to one's original self which contains Buddha-nature.

* * *

Standing Buddha sculpture overlooking MABA

The Heart and Mind

Xiǎnkuān Don Shūshu Sloane

心 xīn is a pictogram of a person's heart.
心 xīn means the heart and mind (Pāli, *citta*; Skt. *citta).*

Questioning the Heart and Mind

Mindfulness is a very central topic to Buddhism, and at this time also in Western psychology. It has found its way into the popular vernacular, with special issues in both Newsweek and Time magazines. Even the Huffington Post is intrigued by Mindfulness. Mindfulness entered the West's consciousness during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Both psychology and neuroscience began in-depth research on the applications of Mindfulness and its effects. Jon Kabat-Zinn, from the clinical psychological side, and Richard Davidson, from the neuroscience side, were both pioneers in bringing Mindfulness to Western psychology. Sharon Salzberg, Jack Kornfield, and Joseph Goldstein are examples of those who brought *vipassana* practice to the West from Southeast Asia. Translations of the Buddha's original discourses were made available thanks to the dedicated work of Bhikkhu Bodhi and Thanissaro Bhikkhu, both Western monastics.

In 1969 at the ripe old age of 22, my first teacher, Ho Kuang-chung, who had introduced me to mindfulness and meditation, one day said to me:

"I am going to teach you how to do Chinese etymology."

I was more than surprised: "How can you teach me Chinese etymology when I don't know one word in Chinese?"

Without hesitation, he responded: "It is because you know not one word of Chinese that I can teach you etymology."

To this day I cannot fathom this. However, I did learn a bit about how to discover the inner meaning of some characters, initially from KC (as was how we affectionately knew him), and later from

Wieger's seminal text on *Chinese Characters*. KC's method of contemplating and understanding pictograms from their origins captured my imagination.

Some nine or so years later, in 1978, I was invited by the wonderful Taiji teacher Huang Chung-liang, who we knew at that time as Al Huang, to assist in a program at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. Esalen was known as one of the early human potential growth centers in the U.S., located on a thin strip of land between Highway 1 and the Pacific Ocean, just south of Nepenthe.

Upon arrival, I met Joseph Campbell, the renowned mythologist, author, and teacher of comparative religion. Al and Joseph were presenting a joint program on T'ai Chi (taiji in pinyin) and the Power of Myth. Each evening after the practices and discussions, I accompanied Al and Joseph down to the hot spring baths, where we would sit in a hot tub, enjoying the moonlight, the sound of the waves some 50 feet below, and observing the sea lions and seals enjoying their evening meal of fresh fish.

Joseph would continue his storytelling, Al would alternately play his flute, and I would sit quietly in the large sulfurous tub, a bit too overwhelmed to totally relax. Once, after several hours, Joseph looked at me as if he recognized that there was indeed another person in the bath, saying:

"And you, what do you do here?"

I was too dumbfounded at first to respond. Al came to my defense:

"Oh, he has studied ancient Chinese history and knows stories about the Chinese characters."

Previously at other workshops, I had shared some of my interest in Chinese characters with Al. However, he had mostly corrected my pronunciation and spent little attention on the stories related to the characters. Al's comment took me by surprise.

During the rest of the Esalen workshop, each evening we would retire to the baths, and Al would play his flute. The three of us alternated between stories and music, and, lest I forget, the sea lions doing their part. Joseph questioned me extensively on the stories

and Chinese etymology I had learned from Dr. Ho. Fortunately, Al was there to fill in many of the gaps in my knowledge, and especially in my poor Chinese language pronunciation. Oh, those tones!

Joseph Campbell wrote extensively on the mythological foundations of both the East and West. He was deeply influenced by Carl Jung and the symbolism of archetypes from both a religious and psychological perspective. But with a little coaxing, I began to tell Joseph and Al about the *I Ching*, about the original story of King Wen and the Duke of Zhou.

After our final lunch of the program – Esalen's meals are among the finest vegetarian cuisine of mostly home-grown fruits and vegetables – Joseph took me aside.

"I spoke to my wife back in New York City. She agreed that we should 'adopt' you and bring you to New York. We can work on a book."

"Oh no," I responded, "Not possible. I have a bun in the oven."

Joseph sighed, "Timing."

I returned to my Midwestern home, and a few months later our first son was born. Joseph passed away nine years later, and there was never that book.

Heart and Mind Interconnected

In the Eastern world, especially in Buddhism, the heart and mind have always been interconnected. The view of the world as being interrelated is much stronger in most of the Eastern philosophies. Therefore, it is no surprise that one Chinese character, 心 xīn, would express both the heart and mind as a single, unified entity.

The etymology of 心 xīn is very straightforward. The oracle script looks like a drawing of a heart any grade school child might make. In the bronze and seal script, the emphasis was on the heart related to the blood. We can see the single line in the middle of the bronze script heart progressing to the aorta full of blood in the seal period heart. The jump from seal to clerical to traditional was a

progressive awareness that the heart functions as a pump. The beating of the heart became more important than showing the blood.

				
Oracle Script	Bronze Script	Seal Script	Clerical Script	Traditional and Simplified Script

The character 心 xīn is found in close to three hundred characters in different positions in the compound, mostly on the bottom, as in 念 niàn for mindfulness, and sometimes in the middle, as in 愛 ài for love. The placement often helps with the meaning as we will see in the chapters ahead. The logogram 心 xīn is also number 61 of the 214 radicals, the building blocks of the compound characters. This radical forms more compounds that nearly all other radicals with the exception of the characters for person, hand, wood, water, and plant. This is a very popular character.

In many instances 心 xīn is written 忄 so it can be placed more easily into a compound character, usually on the left side. One may call this a sideways squeezed character. Of the many characters containing 忄, an example worth noting is 忻 xīn, meaning delight. Another curious example is 憎 zēng, meaning hate, the opposite of 愛 ài, love. The character 憎 zēng is a compound of 忄 xīn and 曾 céng, where the latter, although appearing like an angry face perhaps, is actually etymologically the words that people say to each other at the door when departing (曾 céng by itself means once or already, as in the past). There are close to a hundred characters containing 忄 with various phonetics.

In Sanskrit, the heart organ had a specific name: *hṛd*, the description of the heart as the seat of feelings and emotions, extending to the mind, as seat of thought and intellectual operations. The related term, *hṛdaya*, also refers to the heart or to a region of the heart where emotions, feelings and sensations are taken to heart.

The Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit is 干栗馱 gānlìtuó, where 栗 lì, is the equivalent of *hṛ*, as 馱 tuó is for *dya* and *dhya*.

Another term for mind in Chinese is 質多 zhíduō, which is considered a transliteration for *citta*, although the words do not sound at all alike. Taken separately, 質 zhí means disposition and 多 duō means many or multiple. Perhaps this might be a characterization of the mind as containing multiple dispositions?

What is Psychology of the Heart and Mind in Chinese Buddhism?

In Western psychology, the heart and mind are often considered separately, despite the popular, cultural and linguistic interpretation of feelings, especially caring feelings, as being located in the heart. Western science has long considered the mind as being the domain of the brain and heart has as its major function to be a circulatory pump in the body. As the understanding of the three parts of nervous system has developed, the voluntary and involuntary branches have extended the central brain to include the entire body. We now know that tiny nerve fibers cover much of the internal and external parts of the body. The heart is responsive to demands of the voluntary nervous system during movement and exercise. The heart, although not alone in its sensitivity, is quite reactive to stress responses, particularly related to autonomic (involuntary) sympathetic and parasympathetic responses to endocrine and other hormonal stimuli. In addition, research has confirmed that mental stress is also reflected in the heart, the heart rate and blood pressure, etc. Love, loss, pleasure, and pain all find their ways to the heart. Psychologically, the mind and heart are inextricably interconnected.

We often associate the heart with feeling and the mind with thinking. The advanced and trained heart is kind and compassionate. The advanced and trained mind is wise and humble. Together, the compassionate heart and the wise mind seek to be of benefit to all beings. This is the Path of the Bodhisattva, a person who gives up his/her own desires and cravings, even those desires to be personally enlightened, to be dedicated to helping others. The Bodhisattva is

dedicated to awakening the Buddha-nature, our natural ability to be liberated from suffering. Here is an example of this practice:

Four Great Vows of the Bodhisattva	**四弘誓願**	**sì hóng shìyuàn**
Countless are sentient beings; I vow to liberate them.	衆生無邊誓 願度	zhòngshēng wúbiān shìyuàn dù
Endless are vexations; I vow to eradicate them	煩惱無盡誓 願斷	fánnǎo wújìn shìyuàn duàn
Measureless are the Dharmas; I vow to learn them	法門無量誓 願學	fǎmén wúliáng shìyuàn xué
Supreme is the Buddha way; I vow to attain it	佛道無上誓 願成	fódào wúshàng shìyuàn chéng

A monk asked a Chinese Chān (Zen) master, Zhàozhōu Cóngshěn 趙州從諗 (778–897; Japanese, Joshu):

"Has a dog Buddha-nature or not?"
Joshu answered: "Wú 無 (Japanese, Mu)."

This is one of the most famous riddles, 公案 gōngàn (Japanese, kōan) in the Chān/Zen tradition. These meditation riddles are designed to help the mind overcome the barrier to enlightenment. A well-known book of commentaries on many of these riddles is known as the *Gateless Gate*, 無門關 Wúmén guān, composed by Master Wúmén (1183–1260). His commentary for Zhàozhōu's Dog (Joshu's Dog), 趙州的狗 Zhàozhōu de gǒu, ends with the following verse:

Has a dog Buddha-nature?
This is the most serious question of all.
If you say yes or no,
You lose your own Buddha-nature.

There are many commentaries on this riddle, and even commentaries on the commentaries. No 公案 gōngàn really can be answered by words or logic. It requires a direct experience from the full force of one's being, the result of focusing the entire mind/heart on the puzzle, sometimes for years or even longer. On the surface, it is obvious that in Buddhism, all sentient beings have the seed of Buddha-nature, the ability to attain enlightenment. Dogs are sentient beings, so by extension, all dogs would have Buddha-nature. On the other hand, attaining enlightenment is quite an achievement, requiring great effort of both the heart and mind. Buddhism suggests that the human heart/mind is the form most suited to the practice leading to liberation. Therefore, dogs are not likely to attain full enlightenment while confined to the animal realm.

The character 無 wú, a picture of many trees cut down, is one of several words of negation or no in Chinese. The 無 wú negation means the absence of something, and in this instance, signifies non-duality, a double negative, no and no-no, of something being yes and no at the same time. What is your answer?

Xiǎnkuān Shūshu asked Lotus, the Golden Retriever:

"What would a dog say if asked, 'Does a human person have Buddha-nature?'"

"Woof!"

The dog's woof in this case would question: "Why it is that biped humanoids are anosmic?" Anosmia is a condition related to the loss of the sense of smell. So many animals, including dogs, have a much superior sense of smell compared to humans. It is as if, through evolution, humans used their sense of vision so much, that the sense of smell became less and less important. The human sense of smell became relegated to the epicurean cuisine and to some subtle, either natural or enhanced, perfuming pheromone attraction. Perhaps more was lost? Perhaps there are some very subtle odors to our habit energy?

Habit 習xí:
The Heart and Mind's Inner Communication System

Understanding the heart and mind's communication system is very important. Foremost, there is a repetitive pattern that occurs. In the case of the heart, this rhythmic pattern is our heart beat. Over an average lifetime, our heart may beat over eight million times. The heart rate may change, but the pattern itself is stable unless there is some pathology in the rhythm. Throughout the brain, repetitive patterns also exist. The neurological messages that control many of our autonomic systems of breathing, digestion, hormone release, etc., all have their habitual patterns.

The Chinese word for habit is 習 xí, with the meaning of repeating the same action. The bottom is the contracted character for the sun 日. The upper portion is the doubled 习, a feathered wing. Originally 習 xí was a picture of the wings of a bird 羽 flying over the sun 日. This would take a lot of repeated flapping.

Thinking also has a habitual component. When we learn something, we practice it over and over until it is part of our automatic response pattern. When we walk or play a musical instrument, the repetition of the behavior leads to a neural pathway development. The path well-traveled becomes so worn that we know the way without thinking. This neural pathway allows us to have a shortcut. We don't need to relearn what is already practiced. Conceptual thinking is similar. We practice our reading and arithmetic until we quickly recognize the words and phrases. We memorize addition and multiplication table so well that we can do more advanced computations. This same method can be applied to the higher-level reasoning needed for emotional regulation and decision-making.

Not all habit energy, however, is beneficial. Just as we can learn negative physical habits, like biting our fingernails, we can also learn negative thinking patterns. The most problematic of these patterns lead us to do actions which are harmful, physically, and/or psychologically, to ourselves and others. These negative patterns of

a moral nature are called *kileśa* in Pāli (Skt. *kleśa*), 煩惱 fánnǎo. Bhikkhu Bodhi states:

> "The defects abandoned are the defilements *(kileśa)* together with their residual impressions*(vāsanā).* The defilements are afflictive mental forces which cause inner corruption and disturbance and motivate unwholesome actions. Their principle members are greed, hatred, and delusion; from these all the secondary defilements derive.[1]"

Just as the movement of the fingers, following playing the piano, leave neurological traces encoded in the brain, so it is that repeated emotional and thinking patterns leave impressions in the mind. This neural circuit creates a special type of automatic memory. In Buddhism, these residual impressions are called *vāsanā*, 習氣 xíqì, which function as habituated tendencies. These *vāsanā* become the impression of anything remaining in the mind, particularly from those events and behaviors of the past, as well as knowledge derived from the memory. We notice right away that *vāsanā*, 習氣 xíqì, is made up of 習 xí, meaning habit, and 氣 qì.[2] This term 習氣 xíqì is associated with karma (業 yè), and later, in Yogâcāra Buddhism, with karmic seeds (*bija*, 種子 zhǒngzǐ), a process describing the residual pattern of both wholesome and unwholesome habitual impressions left in the mind.

This habitual pattern system also extends to our five senses. For example, the neural network for our visual system is quite complex. Sight information is highly mediated, that is, it follows an intricate pathway, starting with light bouncing off an object into the eye. The lens focuses the light photon onto a screen, the retina (more precisely onto the macula and fovea for best resolution). The light triggers the rods and cones to begin the multi-step process of phototransduction, turning the light impulses into electrical nerve signals. These signals travel along the optic nerve, through the optic

chiasm, passing by the lateral geniculate nucleus (LGN), along the optic radiations, to the three layers of the occipital cortex, where a mental image of the object is formed. What we see is not the object itself, but a mental representation based on the limitations of the visual light spectrum perceived by the eye and translated by the process outlined above.

Curiously, the least mediated of all the senses is that of smell. The olfactory nerve goes directly to the olfactory bulb in the limbic system, very close to the nucleus accumbens and the amygdala. Many animals have a much better sense of smell than humans, who rely much more on vision and manual dexterity, along with a much more developed cerebral cortex. Humans have both a well-developed speech center and a prefrontal cortex for higher level reasoning.

Thousands of years ago, there was not vocabulary developed, nor the neuro-scientific instrumentation available to understand neural networks, etc. During the time of the Buddha, 2500 years ago, the term *vāsanā* was used to describe how habitual impressions occurred in the mind (see Bhikkhu Bodhi's quote above). Nearly a thousand years later in Mahāyāna Buddhism, specifically Yogâcāra[3], the term *vāsanā*, 習氣 xíqì took on another level of meaning, that of "perfuming." According to this system, the different levels of mind (eight consciousnesses in all) use an inner communication system whereby the seeds (*bīja*) in the storehouse consciousness "perfume" the other levels, each in turn. Thus, the heart and mind are unified.

Landing in Sacramento, I met my younger son, now all grown up in his late 20s. He had driven into the state capital from his home near Mammoth Mountain to meet his Pop, as I was called, who had jetted in from the Midwest. After some catching up on our respective lives at the hotel, we retired late into the night.

Usually I would rise early for my 40-minute sitting practice, but on this morning, the two-hour time difference caused me to sleep in. Opening my eyes, the clock said exactly 8 am. Holy cow, it would be 10 am at home! There on the floor sat my son, legs crossed, hands

in his lap, facing the open sliding glass door. I quietly waited, not wanting to disturb him. After about 15 minutes, my son stretched and stood up. I didn't say good morning, but rather remarked:

"Son, you are meditating!"

To which my son responded with the same inflection: "Pop, you're weird!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because if you saw me brushing my teeth, would you say, 'Son, you're brushing your teeth?'"

The old Pop thought about this for a moment. "No, not likely."

"Would you say, 'Son, you took a shower?'"

"No, not likely."

"Would you say, 'Son, you put on clean clothes, you brushed your hair?'"

"No, not likely."

"Pop, I do these things mainly so I don't smell bad."

"That makes sense."

In a very matter-of-fact voice, my son continued. "But the greatest point of contact between me and the rest of the world is my brain... (he paused) ... I don't want to have a smelly brain."

Pop nodded with a deep appreciation of his son's wisdom. Perfuming: *vāsanā*, 習氣 xíqì.

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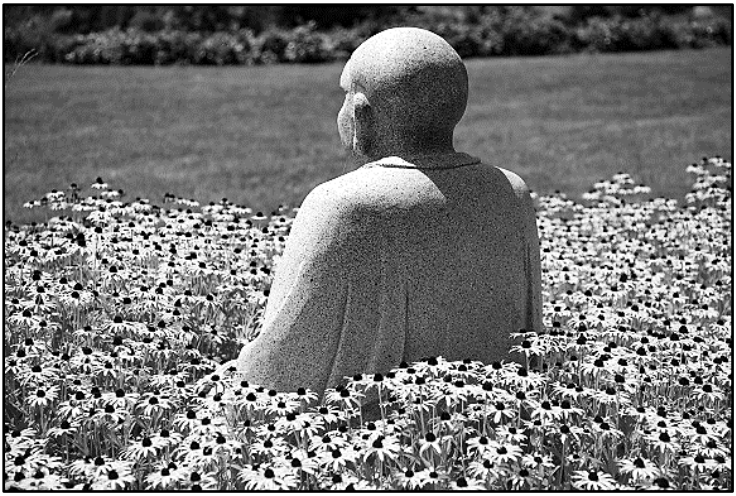
[1] Bhikkhu Bodhi. (1994). "Going for Refuge & Taking the Precepts." www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel282.html

[2] 氣 qì (WG: ch'i, Japanese ki), the word meaning energy, a term often associated with the energy running through the body, used in reference to acupuncture and martial arts. 氣 qì is a picture on the bottom of rice cooking, giving off energy in the form of steam. Hence: vapors 气 coming from boiling rice 米.

[3] Yogâcāra is one of the main branches of Mahāyāna Buddhism. An entire explanation of the history and evolution of Buddhism would require a very long chapter, if not an entire book or more. Briefly, Buddhism refers to the teachings of Gautama Buddha who lived in the 5th century BCE. After the Buddha's passing, according to most records, 18 different schools evolved throughout India.

Over time these schools combined, and eventually two major schools based on the original teachings emerged. One is what is now known as Theravāda (School of the Elders), and the other was called Sautrāntika (School of the Valid Discourses). The Theravāda school continues through today, mostly in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, and other parts of SE Asia. It has a definite presence in the West, particularly in the Thai communities. Western monks, such as Bhikkhu Bodhi and Thanissaro Bhikkhu, were trained in this tradition. Other Westerners, such as Sharon Salzberg, Jack Kornfield, and Joseph Goldstein, studied in Burma and Thailand and brought back what is called an insight or *vipassanā* practice.

Due to certain conditions in India, Buddhism became splintered into those practicing scholarship, and those becoming secluded, solitary monastics. This led to a serious decline until in the second century CE, Nāgârjuna, the 14th Patriarch after the Buddha, revitalized the practice through a series of transformative teachings known as Mādhyamika, or Middle Way, with a strong emphasis on causes and conditions. This was the origin of the Mahāyāna, or the Greater Vehicle. In the 4th century, two brothers, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, the latter being the 21st Patriarch, brought about a major shift in the seed-consciousness theory as it evolved into the theory of the eight consciousnesses, culminating in *ālayavijñāna,* which would become Yogâcāra. Both Mādhyamika and Yogâcāra theories and practice methods would eventually be incorporated in both Chān and Zen.



An arahat sculpture sits among black-eyed susans

Passing on a Gift: Mindfulness

Xiǎnxǐng Sherrie McMillan
Senior Lay Dharma Teacher

I knew nothing about Buddhism thirty years ago. All I knew was that meditation was supposed to be good for you, in some vague way. I had some friends who were interested in meditation in one way or another; one was a psych major, and one was Korean who wished to get back to her roots. We all went, one by one, to visit Japan House on the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana campus where a visitor was teaching meditation. I saw a room full of people sitting still and looking at a wall (I had no idea what they were doing). I walked around for a few minutes and left, quite confused. Soon after, I heard from my friends that the teacher had learned to meditate in a monastery where they hit you with a stick if you were inattentive. I never went back.

I went on with things I was already doing, that I hoped would make the world a better place, that I thought were at the least morally and ethically the right thing to do. I wrote letters for Amnesty International, trying to get political prisoners and wrongly imprisoned people freed, and went to meetings and protests. I stayed involved in environmental organizations. While participating in

these movements for peace and social justice, I kept hearing about someone name Thich Nhat Hanh. Martin Luther King had asked him for advice on peaceful resistance, and had nominated him for a Nobel Peace Prize. I began to learn that there might be more to Buddhism than just meditation.

I joined a co-ed service fraternity, Alpha Phi Omega, where I could do more volunteer work. Our pledge class was named after Jane Addams, and I learned more about helping where you were right now, not just in some distant land. I learned more about difficulties we could run into when trying to help others. Economic circumstances, daily life, and even laws could interfere. It was not easy for busy college students to carry out their good intentions of helping people. Yet I found more people who were interested in making a beneficial difference in the world. I met my future husband there. I learned about the environmental and social costs of eating meat, so I became vegetarian. I needed cookbooks to navigate this new way of eating, and I found an old copy of *Laurel's Kitchen.* The authors described how they came to be vegetarian. Part of their interest in vegetarianism arose from trying to find a healthy diet. They also had studied with various Hindu and Buddhist teachers. They wrote about some of the instructions they had been given on mindful action in their daily activities, like sweeping the floor or washing the dishes, and wrote eloquently about the effect of this; it had brought them a more peaceful life. I thought, peace sounds good, that sound easy, and no sticks were involved. So, I started practicing mindfulness with instructions from a cookbook.

I found that paying attention, always *remembering* what I was doing, instead of distracting myself with more "important" thoughts or even daydreams, opened up the world to me. No longer ignoring my own actions meant I was no longer ignoring the consequences of my own actions. It became easier to do the right thing than the wrong thing. Easier to recycle, because you never forget the value of an item. Easier to not waste water, because it is fully real to you, it comes from some real place, it goes to some real place, there is no way you can waste it by just letting the faucet run when you don't

need it. Always paying attention to your actions, you always remember that your actions have a consequence, and it is easier to do what is fair, just, right, and peaceful. Mindfulness forces you to actually make a decision to do right or wrong, because you are never ignoring your actions and their consequences. Always present, you must face your actions. Facing your actions, you tend to just deal with it and do the right thing, now.

In my mid-twenties, I found my problems with anxiety were worsening, or maybe I was just realizing the impact because I was paying attention. Looking for a solution, I kept hearing about meditation. There was Buddhism, popping up again, but I wasn't looking for a religion, I just wanted to stop anxiety and panic attacks. I checked out a library book about meditation. I can't even remember what the title was, but it was divided into two sections. One was Śamatha and one was Vipassana. I read part of the first chapter on śamatha and started to meditate. It was astonishing, like I had discovered a new world. After about two weeks, my husband asked me what had happened. I was so different, so calm, so at ease, and free from anxiety. I had to explain that I was meditating, which meant I was sitting still for a few minutes, watching my breath go in and out. He was rather bewildered that five or ten minutes of sitting down and doing nothing had brought this change. Of course, it was not just that. I had been doing things that are supposed to help stop anxiety and panic for some months. But meditation made everything work, somehow. That anchoring the mind in the present let me break through all the fear-inducing stories that had filled my mind and I was able to let go of them. Techniques I had learned from psychology suddenly worked the way they were supposed to.

After a few more weeks of meditating, I began to fear that my views of how the world works, and who or what I am, seemed to be wrong. I was very empirical, believing that we are born, live, and die, and that is that, no before, no after, no grand connections. I was instead seeing evidence of a chain of cause and effect, a seemingly unending chain. My mind held depths I had not known, reactions to a present event dredged up emotions and reactions that really had

nothing to do with the present, but grew instead out of the past. Looking at my meditative experiences, and the different view I was seeing of the world now that I paid attention with a clearer mind, it seemed that I had been wrong in the past about many things and I needed to find what was right. This was frightening; we like to think we know who we are and where we come from, and how the world works. I found I did not know what I thought I did. I struggled with these things for some years, and then around 2005 I realized I no longer feared that my old way of thinking was wrong. Based on years of experience I knew it was wrong, and I was comfortable with that. I had a faith that grew out of the certainty of testing and finding something was right. I knew I needed a Buddhist teacher to guide me thorough this rich multitude of Buddhist teachings, and I looked around and found MABA. I have been coming ever since.

When Master Ji said I had to teach, I was doubtful at first. I could see there was so much I did not know. How could I teach? But as he explained it, I have received something and can pass it on. I saw there was truth in that; it does not matter that I don't know everything, whatever I have learned is a gift I have received only because others have made the effort to teach, and I have to pass this gift on to others, as best I can.

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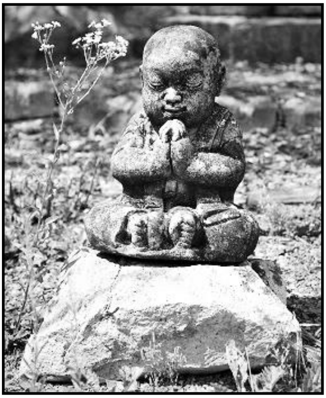

Contemplation in the rock garden at MABA
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Brahmavihāras

Xiǎnxǐng Sherrie McMillan

May 2015

In 2015, we were asked to give talks on topics from Thich Nhat Hanh's book, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*. This book is very dear to me, because it is one of the first Dharma books I bought, more than 20 years ago. I had meditated and practiced mindfulness, but that book really introduced me to the Buddhadharma. What I had been through before was really secular, "me-centered" mindfulness and meditation that we frequently see publicized and taught in America. This was really the first introduction I had to the teaching of the Buddha. I decided to talk about the Four Immeasurable Minds, which are in chapter 24 in the book. Thich Nhat Hanh also wrote another book, based on chapter 24, called *Teachings on Love*. It goes into the Four Immeasurables in greater depth, if you are interested in reading more about them.

We need to know what the Four Immeasurable Minds are, before we can practice them. What are they? The Four Immeasurables are also known as the Brahmavihāras. Brahmavihāra means residence or dwelling place of Brahma. Brahma is a Hindu god, what is a Hindu god doing in this Buddhist teaching? Well, when people came to the Buddha for teaching, they came from various backgrounds. There were many spiritual practices and philosophical outlooks in Ancient India, including various branches of Hinduism and the new Jain religion. People came from various backgrounds and spoke a variety of dialects, but there were some terms and ideas which most people were used to. The Buddha was always careful to use terms with which the person was familiar. He wasn't the kind of person who would use words you did not understand; he was a good teacher. Someone who was Hindu or Jain might ask him a question, for instance, "How do I get to the Brahma heavens?" The Buddha would answer using the terms the man had used. "You get there by practicing these 4 things, love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. If you do that, you will be reborn

in the Brahma heaven, where Brahma is." A Brahmavihāra is a pure abode, it means your mind was dwelling in purity and goodness, in wholesomeness; Brahma was a spiritual concept, as well as a god.

The first of the four is mettā, meaning love or loving-kindness, which is wishing others to be happy and have the causes of happiness. The second is karuna, meaning compassion, which is wishing others to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. The third is altruistic joy, which is sharing in the joy of others; instead of suffering when you see someone else get something good because you don't have what they have, you feel happy when they feel happy. The fourth is equanimity, which is a calm and balanced mind that is not altered by things like craving, anger and ignorance.

You can work with these in two ways. One you have already done at MABA Sunday services. When we do the chanting on loving-kindness and you wish that others may be happy; that is the first Brahmavihāra, mettā or loving-kindness. And you can do that with the other Brahmavihāras, wishing others to be free from suffering, starting with yourself, and extending it out to others, just as we do with love. You can wish that all beings have joy, and equanimity as well. You can work with them in this meditative way, and you can take this practice all the way through full concentration, samadhi and the four jhānas. This practice works on making love, compassion, joy and equanimity really immeasurable. We start off wishing these good things for me, and then progress outward, pushing our boundaries wider and wider. At the start our love is defined by the boundary of "me." May I be happy, may I be well. Someone may even have trouble being kind to himself, so we have to start with this. If I do not love myself, if I cannot be kind to myself, I will not even know what loving-kindness is. There will be no way I can give it to others if I do not practice with myself first. When we learn how to take care of ourselves, we can expand the boundary to those we love, which is not too difficult, because we already love them. Next, we expand our wishes to those for whom we don't really have much feeling at all. These are all the people we don't really notice as we go through our day. Other shoppers at the grocery store, people we don't know at work, these people don't

arouse feelings of love or hate, so we pretty much ignore them. We can wish them well, too. Lastly, we wish even our enemies may be happy and healthy. This is the most difficult so we save it for last, strengthening our loving-kindness by practicing first with easier targets. If we consider that even someone we hate is a human, and has trouble we may not know anything about, it may be easier to be kind. If that is not enough to make you feel better toward them, remember that they were once babies, full of beautiful innocence and joy. What awful things must a child go through in his life to make him an adult who may seem unlikable, angry, and unappealing? If I had lived through that person's life, what might I be like? This mental way of working with the Brahmavihāras can be done with each of the four. In mettā practice, we wish everyone happiness. In karuna, or compassion practice, we wish everyone may be free from suffering; it is often combined with mettā practice, wishing everyone happiness, and freedom from suffering. In the practice of sharing joy, we hope everyone knows this great joy, which is beyond merely being happy for myself. We can think how wonderful it would be, if everyone could be that happy. Just think how much easier it might be to get along with your enemy if you took part in each other's happiness. For equanimity practice, consider how much better it would be for everyone if we all had a calm and peaceful mind, free from anger and greed. There might be no more enemies anywhere in the world, if we could all have a mind like this. I wish all beings may have a mind free from ignorance, hate and greed, we would all be so much happier. If we take a few minutes every week, or maybe every day, to think about others in this way, and train in the Brahmavihāras, we can approach everyone we meet with a good frame of mind. If we have developed Samadhi, we can do this practice with a mind free from the boundaries that our ordinary mind-state draws between self and other. This practice can be taken through the four Dhyanas, removing increasingly subtle barriers to viewing other as the same as us, freeing our mind from the most subtle boundaries of selfishness.

This is a mental way of working with the Brahmavihāras. We are working on our intentions, our good wishes, and also the way we view reality. When there is some disaster in the world, it is in our good nature to say something like, "Oh! I hope they are all right. I wish them well." In the Buddha's teachings, we have this method for developing this further. We all have a natural inclination to be kind and loving; the Buddha taught how to develop this. We have the initial intention as described, and then we direct this intention and purify the selfish boundaries that limit us. Starting with the easy object, me, we move on, strengthening, and increasing our kind intentions by moving on to harder objects, friends, then neutral people, then enemies. We spread our good will further and further, gently expanding the boundaries of our good will. The Buddha even gave us examples to follow, "Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, even so let one cultivate a boundless love towards all beings[i]." We can develop this good mental frame with chanting the sūttas and practicing as described above, but we may find it difficult to put these intentions into practice in our everyday life. Most of us are not practicing in the Dhyanas and working on removing the most subtle mental obscurations. We are still working on less subtle mental issues. We just don't like some people! We get angry, irritated, and jealous in a big way, not just a subtle way. We need some help working with love, compassion, joy, and equanimity in our lives right now. What can we do in our daily lives? It helps to know the Brahmavihāras in more detail. There are difficulties we will run into, in trying to put these good wishes into practice. Knowing what they are, we can be prepared to deal with them. It helps to do the mental practice first, even if we are not great meditators, because it strengthens our resolve and clarifies our goals. It is easier to stay on track when we are mentally resolved on our course of action.

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[i] "Karaṇīya Mettā Sūtta: The Discourse on Loving-kindness" (Sn 1.8), translated from the Pali by Piyadassi Thera. *Access to Insight (BCBS Edition)*, 29 August 2012, http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.1.08.piya.html.

Mettā, or loving-kindness is the first one. Thich Nhat Hanh points out in his book that this is not just being kind, it is really love, free from clinging or any sexual context, thus he calls it love rather than loving-kindness. The example the Buddha gave was the love of a mother who would give up her life for her child. Obviously if you are going to give up your life for someone, that is more than being nice. Being nice is holding the door for someone. But if you are willing to give your life for someone., that's very deep love. So Thich Nhat Hanh likes to call it love. He is rather upset that when we think of love, we think "I love hamburgers." He thinks we should get it back to its pure meaning of being kind, generous, and caring toward others. When we love someone, we want them to be happy and peaceful, free from worry, "may all beings be at ease" Compassion is wanting others to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. We see someone suffering, and we wish their suffering would end. We hope the conditions that led to their suffering also end, so the suffering does not happen again. Sympathetic or altruistic joy is the third Brahmavihāra. This is feeling joy rather than jealousy when something good happens to someone else. We share in the happiness of others as if it were our own. I like to think of this as empathetic joy, because we are not just feeling this because we want to be nice, we really feel others joy. If I see some stranger win the lottery, I am just as happy as if I had won it myself. Equanimity is a balanced mind, that is unshaken by hope and fear. Sometimes when people talk about equanimity they think it means indifference. It doesn't mean indifferent. It just means my mind is not ruled by hopes and fears about myself. When we start thinking, "I want, I hope, I fear, I failed, I succeeded, he has something and I don't, what will people think of me," our minds become upset. We then do things based on the emotions that these thoughts stir up. As a result, we do things we may regret later when our mind has cleared. If we have equanimity, our mind isn't disturbed by all these hopes and fears. Without equanimity, it is actually pretty hard to put the first three Brahmavihāras into place. If you don't have equanimity, if your mind is instead burning with

jealousy, you will not be able to feel compassion when something bad happens to the person who is the object of your jealousy. You are more likely to feel a mean-spirited delight or satisfaction. If you are totally indifferent to someone, how could you give up your life for them? You might not even open the door for someone you don't like. So, while equanimity is fourth in the list, it is very important. All four of them work together, they aid and strengthen each other. It is not really possible to develop one of them without the others. Like so many Dharma teachings, while each of them might often be taught separately, one cannot really be developed without the others.

Thus, if you love someone, you feel compassion for them. If you feel compassion for someone in their difficulty, it is easier to share in their joy when something bad happens to them. Equanimity makes them all possible, by freeing us from the greed and anger that destroy love, compassion, and true joy. What destroys the Four Immeasurable Minds? Clinging to myself, drawing boundaries around myself to protect what is me and mine. What makes the Four Immeasurable Minds immeasurable? We break our boundaries, making our love impossible to measure. This is why one of their names is Four Boundless Minds. Love that is unbounded is immeasurable. Without limits or edges, we cannot measure from a starting point to a stopping point. When we start our mettā chanting, we start off with ourselves and we expand it out a little bit to people we love, then a little more to people we like, then people we don't care about one way or the other, to strangers, and finally to people to those people we really hate. We are expanding our boundaries of loving-kindness from just me and the ones I love to others. We are making our love boundless, freeing our love from what I want, what I like, and expanding it to all beings. When we stop trying to separate mine from yours we can feel love and compassion, joy, and equanimity. Thich Nhat Hanh does not like calling joy altruistic or sympathetic. He feels that this automatically defines it as me feeling joy for you. This is a subtle reinforcement of the line separating me from you. This does not break the boundaries, it supports them. So, he just calls it joy. But most teachers use the word altruistic, so that

we know this is not our usual joy of "happy for me," it is joy for others as well.

When love, compassion, joy, and equanimity are not boundless, when they are bounded these self-views, bounded by me, they become the enemies of l, co, and e. for instance, if you threaten what I love, I may hate you. This is the direct opposite of love. Hate or ill will is the direct enemy of love. But you can see it is based in love, a love that is selfish and based on me. If so didn't threaten something that was mine, why would I hate them? When we have ill will arise to so it is because we feel they threaten something that is dear to us, my car, my house, my belongings, my country, my religion, my nationality. Whatever it is when we have ill will or hatred toward so or something, it is arising from a love that is selfish. It is me-centered. If I love my friends, my things, my car, my country, I may cling to them. Clinging is the near enemy of love. It is closer to love, it is not the opposite of love, but it's still not real love, because that clinging to things or people can lead to hatred. If you see so threaten your things, you aren't going to feel love for them. If the one you love harms you or threatens that love, wild emotions can arise. The feelings of anger and hate that can arise when a loved one harms us are some of the most overpowering emotions we can experience.

The direct enemy of compassion is cruelty. We tend to think that is pretty easy to recognize, and that a person must be pretty evil to be cruel. But it can be more subtle than Cruella De Ville massacring puppies in a Disney movie. A mere word can be cruel, even the lack of a kind word might be cruel. Cruelty arises from selfishness. We see someone is suffering, but do not react with compassion because our good will is centered only on me and mine. For instance, if we see someone stranded by the side of the road, we think, "I don't know them, it's not my problem!" We think we are right to not help them. Or we think, if I stop to help them, I'll be late to a meeting, and then I'll be suffering. You think that your suffering is bigger than their suffering. We may not want to stop for them because we are afraid they may hurt us; we have heard of criminals who pretend

to need help and then attack people. If we don't get out of our car and help them for that reason, it is not cruelty. We are merely trying to prevent a great harm to ourselves. But you can still help. If you do not stop to help them due to this fear of harm, you can still call the police, or a highway assist vehicle. This will bring help for the really innocent stranded motorist, and it will also prevent the criminal pretender from hurting others.

The near enemy of compassion is difficult, it is grief. This is an overwhelming grief that breaks us down, and makes us unable to function. It is natural to feel grief when someone you love dies, or you lose a job, there are all kinds of things that cause us sadness. But with overwhelming grief, we can't move on. We shut things out, we become focused on our grief, it eats away at us for years to come, and we can't get over it because we are so sad and afraid we are paralyzed. When I was younger, I knew a woman who had lost a child when he was very young, and she felt responsible for his death. Her grief was so great, that she was unable to focus on her other children. Many years later, she realized she had missed their childhoods and had missed her chance to mother them as she would have wished to. She was so overwhelmed by her grief for losing the one, so entrapped by her feelings, that she couldn't take care of the others, and she felt great remorse over that. Her grief limited her love and compassion, drew it close and put boundaries on it, so it could only go so far. She did not want this to happen, she loved all her children. But her grief overwhelmed all her other feelings. Pity can also be described as a near enemy of compassion; our compassion is tainted by a sense of superiority; there is a sense that other people's suffering is due to some inferiority on their part, and some superiority on my part. There is a sense of looking down on others.

The far enemy of joy is jealousy. That's when we aren't happy when others are happy; we are jealous because they have a happiness which we do not, or we have to share a joy with others instead of keeping it all for ourselves. The near enemy of it is exultation. That is when I get something I like and I become so

excited I can't think straight. My daughter like to watch funny video shows on television. It seems that every week they have a video of someone who is at a birthday party or is opening up a Christmas present, and they become so excited they begin hopping up and down, and you can just see it coming, they are hopping, and they hop right into the Christmas tree. The tree falls over and lands on the dog, and the tree hits the grandmother on the head, and the lights come down, and it is a disaster. They were so happy they could not control themselves and in their exultation, they wreck everything around them. That's exultation, grabbing onto a good thing deliriously, clinging to it. It feels so good to me that I cannot pay attention to anything else.

Those are what the Brahmavihāras and their enemies are, now how so we work with them in regular life? Some of you know I have an autoimmune disease, and had to be hospitalized a couple of times in the last few years. I spent a few weeks in the hospital, so I got to spend a lot of time with nurses. Nurses pick a career based on compassion; they want to help people. They are good example of how difficult it is to work with compassion, and how to do it effectively. I got to see this put into practice, by some who are doing it very well, and some who are not doing it so well. They are doing a very hard job, and they are on their feet for maybe ten or fifteen hours a day, they are doing physical labor, and there are so many things they have to remember, like technical things, and data about each patient. They are engaged in hard physical labor and a lot of mental and emotional labor too. They are a good example of putting compassion into effect, when we have all these other things that might get in the way. That happens to all of us. We want or need to be compassionate and we can't, because our other emotions get in the way. Maybe we did really well chanting the mettā sūtta and practicing mettā here at MABA, but then on the drive home, someone cuts us off on the highway, and that loving-kindness flies out the window, and we are crabby for the rest of the day. When I was in the hospital, I saw there tended to be three kinds of nurses. The first one tended to be younger, and they obviously could not

have been a nurse for very long. They would be doing a good job, and then you would see them start to withdraw. They would shut down. They would start to not pay attention to you when they saw that you were really sick or that something was really wrong. This was not because they didn't care, they did care; they became nurses because they care. They are people who are very compassionate to begin with, but being confronted by suffering and pain is painful for us. When confronted by someone else's pain, we feel pain. We don't want to suffer, so we pull back, wanting to escape what we see as the cause of our pain. We want to protect ourselves. Sometimes it's also because they develop an attachment to their patients. This is that near enemy of grief. They become attached to this patient, for whom they are caring, and when the patient takes a turn for the worse, they feel grief for the patient, as they would for an old friend. This is a natural feeling to have, but when the attachment is very strong, the grief can be too strong to continue caring for the patient. The caregiver is overwhelmed by grief. They're trying to be compassionate, but fears about illness and death and stopping are stopping them. Fears are putting a boundary on their compassion. They can only go so far. These were mainly newer nurses, with more practice and experience, with some accumulation of wisdom, they can probably get over that.

The second kind of nurse, and most of the nurse fell into this category, were very good nurses. They had been around a lot of suffering and they had seen death. They did not let it stop them. They knew they had work to do, and they did not let the thought of suffering stop them, and they could put their compassion into play, and be there for their patients. If you were in pain or in suffering, they did not back off. They were right there to help you. What bothered them was something different. I have seen this in friends who have been nurses and have had to quit after years of nursing, or take a break from nursing and do another job for a few years before going back to nursing. One of my nurses expressed very well what this difficulty is. She had several patients, of course, and one of them was a patient who needed a lot of attention. The patient had some issues with memory and time, and was fixated on breakfast.

The patient could not remember the time of day, or whether she had eaten recently. She kept asking if it was time for breakfast. When her family were with her, she was quiet and content. But when alone in a strange place, she became worried, and she obsessed over breakfast. She would get up in the afternoon and ask people if it was time for breakfast.

She would get up in the middle of the night and wander the hall asking loudly, "Is it time for breakfast? I don't want to miss breakfast."

Someone on desk duty would say, "It is three in the morning ma'am. It is not time for breakfast."

"Will you tell me when it is time for breakfast? I don't want to miss breakfast."

"We will tell you when it is time for breakfast. You have to go back to bed."

This went on all day and all night. The nurses had to deal with her asking them for breakfast over and over and over again. Moments after they fed her and took her tray away, she would frantically ask strangers in the hall for help because she thought she had missed breakfast. All this was compounded for the nurses by the patient in the next room. The nurses said he was sundowning; I thought of him as the yelling guy. He would sleep all day, probably because he was awake and yelling all night. The nurses would go to the breakfast lady, then they would go to the yelling guy, and then they would come to me. The night-shift nurses in particular would walk into my room and sigh deeply and just stand there a minute before doing what they needed to do with me. On one especially hectic night, the nurse left the yelling man's room and hurried into my room.

She sat down and said, "I just need a minute. I just need a minute. I just need to breathe." She sat there very quietly for a minute, and then she got up, patted me on the arm, and said "I'm going back in, wish me luck!" And she went back to yelling man's room. She was calm and collected and was able to get him settled, at least for a little while. The nurse was under a lot of stress, with a patient yelling

aggressively at her. But she was also compassionate; she took a moment to collect herself and she went back in. This is how most of the nurses were. The real difficulty that this particular nurse had with her work was different, as she explained to a young nurse who was training with her one night.

She was explaining what it was like to work in a hospital. She said, "This floor is not so bad. You feel like you are accomplishing something here. But when I first came to this hospital, they put me in oncology." Oncology of course is where people with cancer are treated. Many of them are dying.

She said, "No matter what I did, it didn't do any good.

"They are sick because they are dying. They are sick from the medicine. They throw up, you clean them up. They throw up again, you clean them up again, they throw up again. Nothing I did made any difference. I had to tell them not to put me on that floor anymore. This floor isn't so bad, because I feel like I am making a difference."

She was getting at what is a big problem for all of us, both in our work and especially in the face of what seem to be insurmountable global problems like climate change and mass extinction. If we feel like we can't make a difference, we can't change things, we give up because our sense of self wants to know that I can make a difference. I can fix this person, I can keep this person from dying. When we can't, because life is the way it is, it always ends in death, it is heartbreaking and depressing to have to face the fact that I can't always cure the sick person, I can't always heal the illness. I can't always stop death and pain.

The self is forced to face its ultimate limits in these situations. Forced to see its own boundaries, it wants to back away. The self is threatened with its most dangerous foe, death, and the realization that death cannot be stopped. Suffering cannot be stopped. The self fears facing its own end, its own limits, so it recoils from these situations.

In a place where I used to work, someone was collecting money for the Red Cross. One of my co-workers refused to give anything.

He did not give any excuses such as, “I already gave,” he just said no.

Someone asked him why not, and he replied, “There will always be another hurricane. There’s always another one. I used to donate, but they just keep happening.”

This is sometimes called charity fatigue. We can get tired of giving money, but it is usually a bigger issue than that. There is always another problem in the world. Why should we keep giving money, if it doesn’t seem to do any good? We have trouble dealing with the fact that some things just can’t be fixed. It is hard to face that, because we hope we can. We have a fear of failure. This is one of the hopes and fears I mentioned earlier. When we do fail, when a teacher sees her student flunk, when you fail at a job, when a nurse sees his patient getting worse and worse despite his best efforts, when another hurricane destroys Florida, we feel we have failed. Even though this isn’t really something that I did, our “I” is caught up in it. We think, “I failed.” We have difficulty facing the fact that this is just the way the world is. This is one of the hardest things we have to face in this life. Sometimes we can’t fix things. This can make people refuse to donate money, and it can make people give up careers that they love.

The third kind of nurse has overcome that. In one of my hospitalizations, I was on morphine for a number of days. They said I had to take it, or my body would have no chance of recovery. So, they made me take it, until I became sick from the morphine.

When I was sick with it and heaving, she rubbed my back and said, “Don’t worry, we’ll get through this. And it will probably happen again, and we’ll get through it again.” She was not stopped by the fact that she could not fix it. She accepted that. She was one of the older nurses, and had been there a long time.

Later on, when I was feeling better, I asked her, “You know, you work such a long shift, you’ve been here twelve hours, you are on your feet the whole time, you are running back and forth, taking care of everybody, how do you do it?”

She said, “Well, I know I am there for my patients, that gets me through my day. I know I can’t necessarily fix them, but I can be there for the when they need me.” She had a very good understanding of what was happening. She knew she could rub your back when you were throwing up, hold your hair out of the vomit, she could hold your hand, she could give you your medicine, she could still be there. This is the kind of person who could volunteer at a hospice, to go sit with dying people, knowing that I cannot stop their deaths, but I can be there for them. I can help them by being there and giving them some comfort or help. I don’t think that this nurse was a Buddhist, but she exemplified a lot of the Bodhisattva ideals. She was willing to be there for you, even though she might not be getting anything back. She might not get a sense of accomplishment from having fixed you or saved you, but she was there to help you in your difficulty; she was there with you.

When we take bodhisattva vows, we vow to help all beings. The metaphor that is often used is a shepherd, who will not leave even one lamb behind. We help everyone; even if it feels like it might not be accomplishing any big result, we keep trying to do good things. When we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, many of us take precepts. These are vows to not steal, lie, or kill; we try not to hurt others. Putting the Four Immeasurable Minds into action is one of the best ways to do that. There are two ways to keep yourself from hurting people. One is to have the discipline to recognize when you are doing something that is wrong and stopping it. The other way is to not do something wrong in the first place. If you have the attitude of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity, and you have them in the immeasurable, boundless way free from self-interest, if you can take that into your life, it is easier to avoid harming others and ourselves, to do things in the kind and balanced way most of us intend, to be a good person. Then we can really help people.

If you are interested in further reading, there are many sūttas and sūtras that include the Brahmavihāra Sūtta (Anguttara Nikāya 10.208), various mettā sūttas (Saṃyutta Nikāya 46.54), and the Conch Horn Sūtta (Saṃyutta Nikāya 42.8). The Four

Immeasurables are found throughout the Buddha's teaching, even when not explicitly named.

The dedication of merit that we have often used at the end of a talk is based in the Four Immeasurable Minds. It can also be used at the start of study or meditation, or at the beginning of your day, to set the right mental outlook for your day.

May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness, may all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering, may all beings know the great joy that is free from suffering, and may all beings dwell in the equanimity that is free from attachment, aversion, and ignorance.

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Lotus plants growing in MABA's Lake
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Guānyīn sculpture at the Blue Lotus House

I Learned from MABA

Xiǎndēng Christina Mak
顯燈
Sangha Member

The first time I got to know about Buddhism was in the early nineties when Jìrú Shīfù came to St. Louis to speak. His Dharma Talk broadened my horizon.

Then I attended the first mediation practice after the mediation hall was built. The first experience of mediation was amazing. It is still fresh in my mind!

I was the kind of person who got tired easily. I was a young homemaker with three kids (learning to work on being a good mother), and my husband had just started his architectural business (I had to learn to be his business partner, business manager, messenger, etc.). My mother was staying with us, and two nieces were also under my care. I did not have time for myself. I was not able to go to MABA often, but I did mediate almost every night; mediation recharged me physically and mentally. I feel I am able to see more clearly, and it is easier to accept whatever even though it is not my desire.

Some years ago, my physical condition was not good. Nothing major, but I was just tired and weak. According to my Chinese herbs doctor, my energy level was very low. I realized it was my turn to take care of myself. I had to take care of my physical body, so that my body could function. Then my body can take me to where I need to go. So, I learned Chi-Gong, Yoga, stretching exercises, walking, and ways of natural healing. I started paying attention to healthy food intake, and took herb medicine if needed. My health improved!

I wanted to practice compassion, so I tried not to eat meat. After I was able not to eat meat, I determined to take the Three Refuges and The Noble Five Precepts. Shīfù gave me the Dharma Name Xiǎndēng 顯燈, which means manifest lamp/lantern/light; I always remind myself to achieve as 顯燈. When I determined I was able to learn the Bodhisattva Path, I took the Bodhisattva Vows.

Getting up early for the one-hour drive to MABA for the 10 am service was a problem for me. Usually, I could not get up early enough to be punctual at the service, and I was nervous in driving the winding hilly road. Somehow, I learned "emptiness" and "without hindrance" (心無罣礙，無罣礙故，無有恐怖) from the Heart Sūtra, and from the Platform Sūtra, "look at things as they are." So I realized my fear is just my illusion. Now I am not only punctual, I can get up early enough to make two or more dishes and bring it to MABA for after Sunday service lunch. I cook with raw and natural ingredients as much as possible, with low salt and low sugar. I am glad the sangha accepts my "light" cooking.

There is so much to learn in the Dharma, I am glad I am able to learn even in this old age. I know I am not able to learn all of Buddha's teachings in this lifetime. I just keep learning, and carry on whatever I learned to my next life.

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我學佛法

麥曾沛儀(顯燈)

我第一次聽聞佛法是繼如師父初來聖路易宏法，師父的佛法講座增長了我的知識，擴潤了我的視野。

禪堂建築完成後，我參加了禪修初學斑，第一次學靜坐的感覺是身體與精神上未曾經歷過這樣的輕鬆舒暢。

我是個體質瘦弱，容易疲倦之人。那時候，我是有三個孩子的年輕家庭主婦，(正努力在學習做個好母親)，外子正開始他自己的建築師事務所，(我要學習做他的事業伙伴，公司的經理，信差，等等)。我没有自己的時間。我是不能常上美中佛教會。但我能差不多每晚都練習靜坐。靜坐使我安心，補充我的體力與精神。我感覺我現在比較能够接受事件的變幻。

十多年前，我的體力下降，沒有精神。中醫說是體力透支。我明白到這是我要照顧自己的時候。我要照顧好我這個軀壳，它要是病倒了，我要幹什麼或要去那裡都去不成了。我要鍛練這個身軀，希望它能強壯起來，身意合一，好好學佛法。於是，我學氣功，瑜珈，拉筋，走路。學飲食自然健康食品。我的健康真的有進展。

為了增養慈悲心，我開始學習不食肉。當我可以不再吃肉之後，我決定要請師父接引我皈依三寶及傳授五誡。師父給我的在家法號是顯燈。我時常提醒自己要做顯燈。在我決定要發菩提心，學習行菩薩道時，我便請授菩薩誡。

早上開一小時彎彎曲曲的山路準時到達禪堂 10 點鐘的早課是我的一個難題。我不能早起，另外山路的迴轉使我開車很緊張。後來，學習了《心經》與《金鋼經》，《心經》說:″心無罣礙，無罣礙故，無有恐怖″,《金綱經》的”無我相、無人相、無眾生相、無壽者相″,又另《檀經》說:″看本來面目″。我看到了彎曲的路是我自己覺得它危險。師父說保持“正念”〔要全神灌注，要知道，知道〕。我開車時，學會了全神灌注，知道我在開車。現在我不單只準時到達，更兼带了兩，三道巳經在家煮好了的素菜上禪堂作午僐用，供養僧團與信眾。我開始吃素後，便學食物的營養，煮原汁，原味，少塩，少糖的健康食譜。還好，大家都能接受我煮的淡而原味的素食。

佛法既深且廣，學佛的路很長遠；無邊、無際的。我很幸運，老來仍有能力學習佛法。有僧團與善友的啟發與支持，雖然我這生沒法學習佛陀的一切教誨。我只是繼續學習，讓我今世聞法的善業帶到下世去。

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Arahats sit in the Chán Hall rock garden

To Be of Benefit to the Children

Xiănwăn Tracy Turner-Bumberry

Director of MABA Children's Program

I visited MABA for the first time in April 2005. I was working on my Masters in Counseling, and my supervisor wanted our group to experience a culture different than our own. My friend and I made the decision to visit a Buddhist temple, and were quite surprised that there was one in Augusta Missouri!

I was nervous when I initially attended; afraid that I would do something (or not do something) that was incorrect or improper. I remember feeling very comfortable once this feeling subsided, and was immediately drawn in to the teachings and the attendees. The teachings seemed so relevant to my life and values; the people so kind and caring! I made a decision to visit MABA again, and also brought my daughter with me. The two of us attended for nearly a year before I made the decision to take my Refuge and Precepts Vow in 2007, and my Bodhisattva Vows in 2008.

I became a Dharma teacher in 2009, and enjoyed learning even more about the Buddhist teachings while preparing my talks. I have

always enjoyed taking these very deep teachings and simplifying them in ways to help me in my daily life. I focused my teachings on this as well; how to incorporate a teaching from thousands of years ago into your life in this present moment.

I believe my quest of simplifying these teachings is what drew me into wanting to start a children's group at MABA. My spiritual friend Eileen Heidenheimer and I noticed that MABA did not have retreats for children, so decided in 2012 to host a one-day children's retreat. It was well attended, and the parents of these children were thrilled that we had an event on mindfulness, loving-kindness, and compassion for the young ones! We hosted a children's retreat again in 2013, and decided at that retreat to begin a monthly Children's Program to better reach and involve our young children into Buddhist teachings. We asked permission from the monastics, who were thrilled to approve, and began our monthly Children's Program in 2014.

Our Children's Program just finished our fourth year, and we have steadily increased in attendance. I believe I have found my Buddhist calling by working with and teaching these children, and in effect, them working with and teaching me! I am excited to resume our Children's Program in 2018 with a new theme, new activities, and possibly even more new children!

In my busy life, complete with home, career, and many volunteer commitments, MABA is the place I know I can return to after any length of absence and feel welcomed and at home. I feel fortunate to have MABA, and my sangha in my life, and look forward to many more years with them, learning and growing in our Buddhist faith.

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MABA Monthly Children’s Day Program

Xiǎnwǎn Tracy Turner-Bumberry

Our monthly Children’s Day program follows this format:

- Morning greeting
- Sharing of joys and sorrows
- Children’s book reading focusing on our yearly practice
- Discussion of our practice
- Sitting Meditation
- Walking Meditation
- Eating Meditation
- Small Craft

Last year’s (2017) theme was the First Precept, described to the children as Respecting and Loving All Things. We discussed respecting and loving ourselves, our parents, siblings, relatives, friends, pets, all animals, the environment, and the entire world! Some wonderful things we did this year included:

- Creating a craft hug for our parents
- Making a meditation stone
- Planting flowers at MABA
- Having a Pet Blessing with rescue dogs
- Creating friendship bracelets
- Picking up trash around MABA

This year (2018) we will choose to work on the Second Precept, and focus on all the ways we can give.

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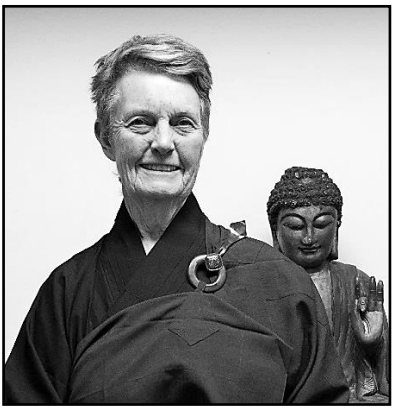
A Buddha sculpture invites quiet meditation at MABA

Transition, Confluence, and Transformation: How I Am Who I Am



Xiǎnlù Eileen Heidenheimer
Children's Program Teacher

In the spring of 2004, I found myself balancing on the cusp of all I knew from the years behind me, and all I didn't know about the moment I was investigating. My husband had passed away in late 2001, and I was learning to let go of all the plans we had been creating for the years ahead. In late 2002, chronic pain had flared up with intensity, placing my body, mind, and spirit into "knowing and understanding nothing" mode, and bringing forth so many old layers of fear and anxiety. At the same time, I was aware of an immense amount of freedom to quiet the mind, explore, and listen more deeply. My roots were deeply grounded in traditions, and beliefs of love and compassion, and kindness. Nurturing entered me daily from my three communities – family, school community, and an amazing Catholic social justice parish. Where would the next step take me? What else would I invite into my life? Who would lead me to my next "yes?"

I began to pay attention to the words "What turns my head?" Looking through old journals and reflections, I saw 30 years of

writings on mindfulness, meditation, and Buddhism. My mindfulness practice was one that had been intrinsic to my Montessori career. In her writings, Dr. Montessori instructed us not to enter the classroom unless we were spiritually prepared to be fully present to each child, in each moment. What if I instructed myself to do the same while I was driving, chatting with friends, or sitting alone at night? What if I designed my own practice of sitting and walking meditation, gathered up dozens of books on Buddhism and read non-stop, every day? These were the "What if?" questions that Eileen the introvert asked. But Eileen the seeker began to emerge to search for a sangha, a place I knew was right. MABA was the third sangha I visited, and I was home. . . well, if home can include not always feeling comfortable, sometimes judging oneself as not worthy, and being afraid of making "mistakes." I made quick getaways following my first 3-4 visits, not staying for lunch or speaking to anyone. I am definitely a baby step person! Then I attended a one-day retreat, during which I uttered a few words. And I returned–more Sunday services, more retreats, more deep listening and opening of the heart. In the 13 years since my first visit, I have taken the Five Precepts and Bodhisattva vows, which are daily reminders of how to live a wholesome life. I've become very familiar with the strength of ego, becoming more skillful at recognizing when it leaps to the forefront of conversations and actions. And I've learned to become much gentler with myself, not becoming attached to a mental shopping list called "How to be Perfect."

Probably, the most challenging area of practice for me was finding and taking the time for sitting meditation. Dozens of "But don't forget! What if you forget? Oh, you forgot!" messages played leapfrog through my mind, the moment my body touched the cushion. The writings of Pema Chodron, filled with wisdom and good humor, helped me to see reminders as reminders, words as words, thoughts as thoughts, then return to my breath. My other teacher, one which had been present for my entire lifetime, was my body. Truthfully, I had rarely befriended my body, often ignored it. And now, it was messaging me throughout the day, offering me a place

to begin looking inward, a place where I could send my breath. When years later, I read and heard about Mindfulness of the Body, I smiled, realizing that the Buddha had come up with this practice long before I did. And so, I continued to sit, stand, and walk with my body and breath as boon companions.

In 2010, when my Montessori career ended suddenly, I once again asked myself: “What turns your head?” For over a decade, I had become deeply interested in end of life care. The left side of my brain kept asking “Why?” while the right side answered, “Experience it, and you will see.” While attending a Compassionate Care for the Dying conference in Boulder, I spoke briefly to Roshi Joan Halifax, sharing with her my lack of understanding as to where my passion was leading me. Her response: “How wonderful! There is so much to learn when you realize that you don’t know the answers!” During my seven years of volunteering with BJC Hospice, I have carried her words with me. Before entering a patient’s room, I stop and breathe and say, “I don’t know.” I sit with the dying, their families, and friends. I pray and chant and meditate with them. I breathe in the essence of another’s physical, mental, and emotional life, through holding hands or touching a forehead. And I have faced the truth of my discomfort with my own death, learning so much about the impermanence of all things and all beings, learning to dissolve without clinging, learning to love each precious moment of life.

Every morning before breakfast, my dog Willie and I recite Thich Nhat Hanh’s Five Contemplations, repeating our intention to be mindful as we walk our daily path. As I set this intention, I hold and recognize within me the Triple Gem: the essence of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. I know that wherever I go, that is where I need to be. Whatever I do, that is what I need to be doing. And I continue to notice the people, the concepts, and the places that turn my head, feeling such gratitude for how my life has unfolded, and such gratitude for the living experience of MABA, walking by my side every day.

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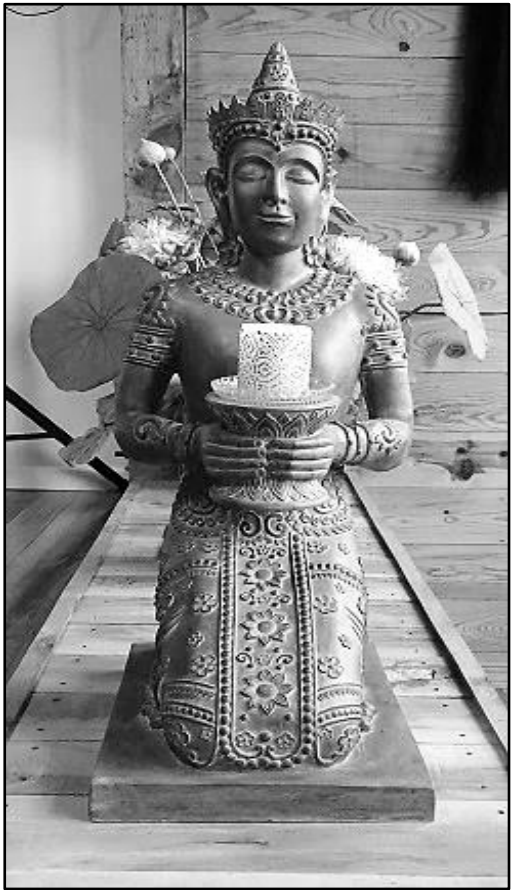

One of the sculptures in Prajñā Hall

Quieting the Mind

Xiǎnyīn Stacey Winterton
Lay Dharma Teacher

As a young child, I remember sitting in St. Dominic's Catholic church in New Orleans, with my devoted grandmother. I loved going there while mass was not in session; the large space empty and silent, the only people there being me and Grandma. She would light a candle and say her prayers. While she was praying I would take in the silence and it would relax me; it was the only silent time I had during my childhood. Thinking back, this time away from distraction must have had a large part to play in me choosing a spiritual path that is largely centered on quieting the mind, Buddhism.

The times in silence in church resonated so strongly with my quiet and introverted personality. My child-self was often put into chaotic situations that did not fit my temperament. My mother is an alcoholic and an addict, and my father was never in my life. As any adult of alcoholic parents knows, this is often a life of instability, fear, and lack of control. My only refuge was in inner silence, prayer, and distraction.

Fortunately, my personality is also one of resilience and compassion. I also felt from a very young age that the struggles I was having to endure were there to strengthen me. Now I would rephrase that, and say it was there to help clear some of my karma, and teach me forgiveness and compassion.

As my childhood and teenage years went by there was more suffering and a tremendous amount of trauma. All of which I used as motivation to have a life as an adult that had no resemblance to the chaos I was accustomed to. I had a strong desire to succeed in school, and also a need to help others. This guided me to go to college, something neither of my parents did, and to become a nurse. I put 100% of myself into school and was determined to be successful. This was the only way I knew to gain happiness, or my definition of what happiness looked like. To me happiness equaled stability. I graduated at the top of my class in nursing school, and won an award for the most compassionate nursing student. I was also offered a very sought-after job in a busy labor and delivery unit. All was going as I had wanted it to: I had a career in front of me, and I had been dating a stable and kind man who had a successful career himself. He proposed to me and we were married right after graduation. My past was seemingly behind me, and I had no apparent need for religion or spirituality at this point in my life. Then the phone rang.

After a lengthy conversation, my fiancée Gage hung up the phone, and told me he was being asked to interview for a job in a tiny village in Austria. If he says yes to the interview, he HAS to accept the job, he said. I had 24 hours to decide if this is the route I want my life to take. My initial reaction was total dread! I had never been away from New Orleans. My career was about to begin, and I would have no way of working in Austria. What was I going to do all day?! Through a lot of conversations with others, I was convinced that going to Austria was the right thing to do.

Months later, we landed at Munich airport with our crazy Dalmatian, Ezzy, and drove to our new home in Kufstein, Austria, scared and excited. That day, Gage went off to work. There I am

totally alone, with the inability to talk to anyone, as I didn't speak German, had no friends, and no idea how to get around or how to function. This was the suffering that led me to the Dharma.

I had no idea what to do with myself! I was SO used to being totally distracted with school, work, and TV, and suddenly I had none of that. I decided to get pregnant, and it seemed like the right thing to do for many reasons. I would be able to stay home with the baby, was far away from the negative influences of my family, and had no idea what else to do with myself. Being a naturally minded person, I decided I wanted to have a natural birth and have the healthiest pregnancy possible. This led me to a technique called "Hypo-birthing" (which is a kind of visualization), and to a prenatal yoga class. These two practices reintroduced me to silence and going within, something I hadn't experienced since a young child in church.

Around the same time, I was going to the weekly yoga class and practicing Hypo-birthing, I met an American born woman named Donna who had been living in this small village for 20 years. We immediately became wonderful friends. I was talking to her about yoga and how I loved the silent ten-minute "shavasana" at the end of the class. She suggested I listen to a series of talks she had recorded on cassette tape by a Buddhist Nun. I didn't even know there were Buddhist Nuns! I was open to listening to them, and made a routine of listening to 30 minutes a day of the hours of talks given by this nun, Pema Chodron, at one of her retreats. I totally fell in love with what she was saying. It resonated more deeply with me than anything I had ever heard or read. I knew that what she was teaching was a true way to get happiness, and a happiness that I didn't even know existed. A sustained happiness that wasn't dependent on anyone but myself and practices I could do in my apartment, alone, in Kufstein, Austria.

I began meditating ten minutes a day from that point on, and devoured every book that Donna had on Eastern thought. My life changed as I began to realize that this was my path, and that I wanted to pursue it all the way to the final stage of liberation.

Three years of my life were spent in Austria, followed by three years in a small Cajun town in Louisiana. I spent those six years reading all I could find on the Dharma and dreaming of a day when I would have a sangha nearby that I could practice with. I felt there was a big gap in my life that would be filled by a community of like-minded people; I knew this would be a tremendous help to my practice. Those six years were followed by my last move, to St. Louis. When my two children, husband, and I found out we were moving, one of the first things I did was to research Buddhist sanghas in the area. I happened upon the Missouri Zen Center and began going to Sunday services there right after we moved to the area. It was so nice to finally practice with others! I continued sitting there regularly for two years.

I was told about MABA from a friend who was planning to go there for Vesak Day in 2011. My family and I went for the first time on a rainy day. I was itching to go into the meditation hall, listen to one of the talks, and participate in one of the meditations. My daughter Chloe was only two, and son Tommy was five. It was too much for my husband to handle them alone at Vesak, so I wasn't able to participate. Staying outside for about an hour with the kids was my entire first experience of MABA. It was beautiful, but I was too hyper-focused on the kids' comfort and happiness to really get to experience the grounds, and didn't get to enter any of the buildings.

I finally got a real feel for MABA about six months later. A friend and I took our older kids to a family retreat (in 2012) that was held annually at the time. That was exactly what I needed: Tracy and Eileen led the retreat and watched the kids, while the adults were able to participate in the meditations and chanting! It was truly a blessing to have the kids safely attended to, while I practiced with a group inside the beautiful Chán Hall. Spending the entire day in the serene environment, and meeting so many welcoming lay sangha members, truly made me feel like I had found my home. From that day on I tried to come out to MABA whenever I was able. Jennifer, the friend I went to that retreat with, and I approached the

teachers about having a children's program more often. We found it to be such an amazing service for us stressed out parents. We hoped that we could get them to hold a service for kids on some Sundays so we could participate in a regular service now and then. To our amazement, they liked the idea and implemented it almost immediately! If this hadn't happened, I would have had to wait at least two more years to come back to MABA. Instead, because of their generosity, I was able to attend services once a month.

I continued going to Sunday services and retreats when I was able for the next couple of years. In 2013, I took refuges and precepts from Master Jìrú. By that time, I felt I had a developed a teacher/student relationship with Master and a friendship with Ven. Kōngshí. I wanted to be at MABA as much as possible and often told people how wonderful it would be to live there! Over the next year, the kids and I would go to MABA to volunteer during the week, and I would come to services on Sundays. I was also extending my meditation time at home, sitting twice a day for 40 minutes at a time. Being surrounded by such good people and deepening my practice had a tremendously good effect on my sense of well-being: I saw the fruits of the Dharma in all of my interactions, relationships, and in how I saw the world. I was feeling very fortunate indeed! Particularly since I found a mentor in Ven. Kōngmù.

A Western monk who was my age and very well read in the Dharma, Ven. Kōngmù was generous with his time, and as I was very eager to learn and get guidance, I asked him A LOT of questions. He became a mentor to me over the next year, recommending lots of reading materials, offering guidance on my practice, and always answering all of my Dharma questions via email. He lived in Taiwan during that time and communicated with me via the Internet. I grew the most in my practice during that time. I committed myself to the Jhāna path, and was meditating multiple hours a day. The meditations were so blissful, I couldn't wait to mediate more. I truly understood why the Buddha and his monastics would choose a life of renunciation. It was the most joy I had ever

experienced, and it was coming from within me, not from anything external!

When Ven. Kōngmù made the difficult decision to disrobe, he left me with some important suggestions for my path. One was that I should attend a long, silent, residential retreat to deepen my practice even further. Another was that I should teach. I followed both of his suggestions, the latter with much trepidation, as I have always had a terrible fear of public speaking.

I found a retreat that was being offered by Shaila Catherine. She is a teacher and author who wrote two books on the Jhānas. Those were books introduced to me by Ven. Kōngmù, which got me interested in learning about and practicing those attainments. When I saw she was coming to Kansas City soon after he suggested I find a retreat, I knew I had to go. It would be one of two extended silent retreats I have done with Shaila Catherine; they very profoundly deepened my practice. I recommend to everyone interested in this path to add retreat practice to their lives, as I find it immensely beneficial.

I then felt the need to assess his teaching suggestion. I resisted the idea at first, but the seed had been planted. Soon after this occurred, Don Shūshu sent out an open invitation for people taking Bodhisattva Vows to give a short ten-minute talk at the Bodhisattva retreat in 2014. I figured this was the perfect chance to see how giving a talk would be. I could certainly do ten minutes! I emailed Don and offered to take one of the talks. A couple of weeks later I came to find out the talk was really to be 30 minutes long. I managed to get through it and was very surprised at how beneficial the process was. I learned so much from preparing that talk. When it was over, I was asked to give it again during a Sunday service. The rest, as they say, is history. I have given multiple talks since then and have led a Dharma Sharing group at MABA, as well as group discussions during one-day retreats. While I am still not 100% comfortable speaking to groups, I always feel like I am being of benefit by doing so. One of the Bodhisattva Vows I took in 2014 was to always offer the Dharma freely when asked. I have taken this

to heart, and always try to share the Buddha's teachings to those interested in them. This goes for people in the broader St. Louis community as well. I have given multiple talks on Buddhism to various groups outside of MABA and have other talks currently lined up. For example, I recently spoke to a retirement community on my Buddhist practice. I feel honored and blessed to be asked to speak every time it occurs.

I feel immensely fortunate to have found MABA, the community is truly a family to me. The teachers and monastics there have guided me to grow in ways that are beyond words. They have helped me stay on the path, and to keep focus on my goal to help relieve all beings from suffering in any way I can.

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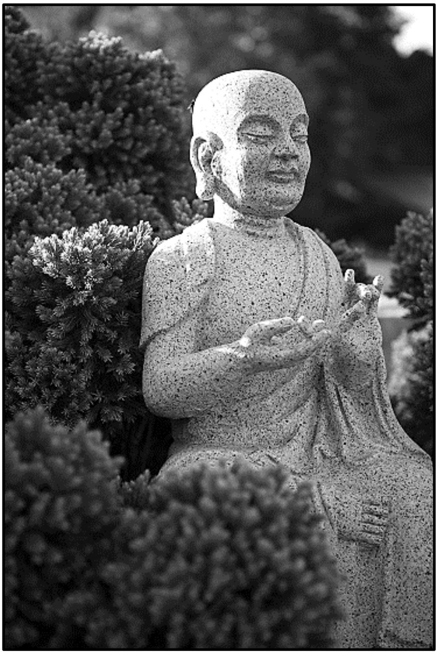

Calm abiding in a MABA garden
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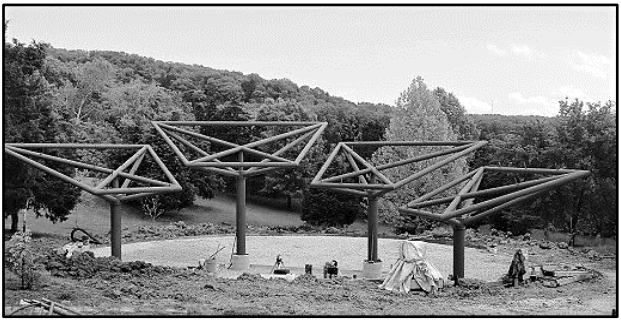
SUDHANA CHILDREN'S PAVILION

Sudhana Pavilion is a charming little area at MABA constructed in 2013. The namesake was after the most well-known youthful pilgrim in Mahāyāna Buddhism, Sudhana, who interviewed 53 Bodhisattvas in many different worlds in search of the eternal truth. This pavilion is for our Buddhist children to come practice in their study groups. Children hold the key to a long-term goal of MABA, for Buddhism to take roots in the United States, thus materialize a better future for all people. Sudhana is the name of a young boy who goes on a great quest for enlightenment in the last chapter of the Flower Ornament–Avataṃsaka (Huáyán Jīng)– Sūtra.



Sudhana Pavilion during construction

Equanimity

Xiǎnyīn Stacey Winterton

My talk today is on equanimity, which is the seventh factor of enlightenment. Over the last couple of months, the topics of the Dharma talks here at MABA have been one of the seven factors per week. At our annual Bodhisattva retreat in March these talks were given and it was decided that they should also be shared during the Sunday service. I have changed my talk up a little as to make it a bit fresh and hopefully not too boring for those who heard me speak on this topic in March. The references I have used for this talk are Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*, Commentary from Access to Insight's Piyadassi Thera, and Buddhaghoṣa's commentary "The Vissugimagga." Today's talk is the final in this series. We have been going somewhat in order and equanimity is the final factor.

Before I begin speaking about this factor, I would like to give a little overview on the entire seven factors of enlightenment for anyone who is unfamiliar or needs a bit of a refresher. I will then talk about what equanimity is, how it is strengthened, and how we can begin to use some of what is discussed today in our daily lives.

So, let me tell you what the seven factors are. They are Mindfulness, Investigation, Energy or Diligence, Joy, Tranquility, Concentration, and then Equanimity. The Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh in his book, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teachings* says, "The seven factors of awakening offer a description of both the characteristics of awakening as well as a path to awakening." He says that enlightenment is growing in us all the time. When a person becomes enlightened then their minds will be characterized by these seven factors and when working to develop full enlightenment these factors show us a path to get there. As we strengthen the previous factor the one following begins to strengthen, although this process isn't completely linear.

The factor that I am speaking of today, equanimity, comes naturally to a mind that is very concentrated. Therefore, I will spend a bit of time talking about concentration as a path to equanimity.

Equanimity is a state of peacefulness, evenness, and balance of the mind, that comes from concentration. The direct translation of Upekkhā (The Pali word for Equanimity) is "To look over." It's the ability to see without being caught in what we see. When we have this type of perspective and spaciousness of mind, it is likened to putting a cup of salt in a large body of water, compared to putting it into a bowl of water. The salt is not even noticed in the lake or river but completely takes over the essence of the water in the bowl. Things do not agitate a mind that is equanimous as a result of a calm and concentrated mind. We can look at a common example of someone who needs tremendous concentration in order to stay balanced, such as a yogi, or a slack ropewalker, to see an analogy of how the mind becomes balanced through concentration. When a yogi does a very difficult balance pose, if he or she is not very concentrated they will fall and not be able to maintain balance. The same is true of the mind. If the mind is not concentrated it is very difficult for it to remain non-reactive, and non-preferential.

A story that I read in Bhante G's *Eight Mindful steps to Happiness* shows an example of the benefits of this quality of mind. Some of you may have already heard this story but because it is so incredible I would like to tell it again. Bhante G is a Theravadin monastic who lives in West Virginia. He tells a story of a time he was in an airplane and the captain came on the speakers to say that they would have to make an emergency landing. He shows that he has an extremely equanimous or non-reactive mind during this event. So, as the 300 or so people on the plane are in a tremendous amount of suffering and panic, Bhante G uses Right Thought to investigate the situation and his mind. He decides that now would be just as good a time as any to die since he has recently done good deeds, and that he would like his mind to remain calm when he loses consciousness. So, he looks out the window at the engine and marvels at the beauty of the colors of the flames. He said at 35,000

feet that they were gorgeous, like fireworks, or the aurora borealis. He stays marveling at the beauty of the flames as the plane makes an emergency landing. This is a mind imbued with equanimity.

Another example that shows an equanimity that perhaps is more relatable, is a grandmother's love. An experienced grandmother has already been through raising children. She knows children's drama and does not get agitated by things that perhaps a less experienced parent would. She has wisdom from experience, which leads to equanimity. One moment a child says he hates her and the next he says he wants to marry her. She does not take it personally and remains calm. She knows that children's thoughts and emotions are impermanent and will change very quickly.

This mental state is fairly fantastic. Can you imagine the freedom we would have to not be pushed around by the worldly winds of like and dislike, fame and blame, gain and loss, and pleasure and pain? Shaila Catherine who is an insight and concentration teacher states that Equanimity is the conditioned state that most resembles enlightenment. Key word here is conditioned. Because this state comes from the favorable conditions of a highly concentrated mind, wholesome behavior (which is needed for concentration), and insight, it is not nirvana. Nirvana is beyond conditions. It is the only non-conditioned state.

Up until now, I have given some lofty examples. But as TNH discusses, we all have the seeds of all qualities in us. We all have some equanimity and we can all benefit from strengthening the amount that we do have. An important reason for this is peace.

When walking the other day, from the bus stop dropping off my daughter, I heard a man screaming very loudly from inside his house. Seemingly yelling at his dog who I heard barking only a moment earlier. Because this quality of equanimity was seemingly weak in this man, he was very quickly reactive. He did not have the spaciousness and perspective of a person with a trained mind. Sadly, we may assume that conditions and karma have not been right for him to develop these qualities to prevent harm from being done to both himself through his rage, and his dog, and anyone else around

him at the time. We have all experienced this. We have all had moments when our awareness is low, we have had a bad day, we may be distracted, and because of this we are more reactive than we want to be and we do or say or think something unwholesome that we later regret. This is the importance of equanimity and a point that I hope will be taken home with you today. Through diligent practice on the cushion, we can bring peace to ourselves and to the world.

The Buddha gave an analogy of a strong rocky mountain: "Just as a rocky mountain is not moved by storms, so sights, sounds, tastes, smells, contacts, and ideas, whether desirable or undesirable, will never stir one of steady nature, whose mind is firm and free."

A person who has this virtue is able to see all beings as equal. Now, I don't need to tell you the benefits that would bring; to not classify others as stranger, friend, or enemy but to look at all beings equally and compassionately. We see that we are all the same. We are all made of the five aggregates and are all subject to impermanence. As Sayadaw U. Pandita says in a Tricycle magazine article I read, "There is only Nama and Rupa, mind and body, arising and passing away from moment to moment." When we have this insight, we drop our preferences for one person or any being over any other. Quanyin Bodhisattva is a nice representation of perfect equanimity to me. She sits at ease and hears all the cries of the world. She doesn't discriminate and only listens to being's sufferings and her mind remains calm.

There is a commentary written that describes how to develop and strengthen equanimity. It is the *Visuddhimagga* or *The Path to Purification* written by Buddhaghoṣa in 430 CE. This book is divided into three sections. The second section is on Samadhi meditation, the way to deep states of concentrative absorptions (jhānas), and the divine abodes practice.

The jhānas are different stages of deep absorption that are characterized by factors that arise in this altered state of consciousness. When one becomes focused on one point and overcomes the five hindrances to meditation, then access concentration is developed, followed by the jhānas, of which there

are four mundane. Much can be said about the hindrances and the jhānas, and has in many books. I am not experienced or knowledgeable enough to speak in-depth about them. But I will discuss them a little as I think it's important to know the path of concentration meditation. When we sit down to meditate we generally see one of five hindrances enter the mind, blocking our ability to focus on our meditation object. They are sense desire, ill will, doubt, sloth and torpor, and restlessness and worry. When we sit and our mind starts lusting over something, thinking that we really wish the person next to us was more quiet, when we start falling asleep, or feeling like we are going to crawl out of our skins because we cannot sit another moment, then we are hindered and cannot meditate. There are various antidotes to each hindrance, which I won't go into. But know that replacing any of the hindrances with wholesome thoughts; thoughts of love, compassion, generosity, and equanimity are helpful. Once we have overcome the particular hindrance that we are plagued with at that sitting, then we can begin focusing on our meditation object.

Once concentration is established we will notice certain factors arise. The first two jhānas have the factors of joy, happiness, one pointedness, applied and sustained thought. We will notice that our sense doors close and we are in a state of bliss and rapture. The second jhāna has confidence and happiness as the defining characteristics. The mind then starts to lose interest in the course quality of rapture, and equanimity develops. In the third jhāna equanimity is strengthening and one pointedness of mind is prevalent. The fourth jhāna has equanimity as its main factor. Shaila Catherine states that of all the people she knows to have reached this state, equanimity is the factor they would chose over the others. The sublime happiness and peace of this quality greatly overrides even rapture. Once coming out of jhāna the mind is very equanimous and clear. It is able to cut through the reality of things and gain deep insights that lead to liberation. This is what the Buddha did when he became enlightened. He used his clear mind to see the reality of dependent origination, karma, past lives, etc., and

became the Awakened One. This is the one of the methods to acquiring equanimity.

The other method as described by Buddhaghoṣa is through the Bhramavihāras. The Bhramavihāras are also known as the Four Immeasurables, or the divine abodes. This practice also leads to the jhānas since it also develops concentration. The four divine abodes are Mettā, or goodwill/loving-kindness, Karuna, or compassion, Mudita, or altruistic joy, and Upekka, or equanimity. Buddhaghoṣa tells us the practice that can be used to develop these qualities. Normally we begin with ourselves and say a series of phases to wish ourselves goodwill and open our hearts. We then say the phrases to a respected person, a dear person, a neutral person, a difficult person, then to all beings. The traditional phrases are, "May I be happy, may I be free from suffering, may I be free from mental distress." We can change them to whichever phrases resonate with us. To develop equanimity, we change the order of the people we send the wishes to. We begin with the neutral person, then the respected person, the dear person, then the hostile one, then lastly ourselves. After we do the practice of mettā, karuna, and mudita in this order we then work to break down the barriers by developing a neutral feeling towards all beings. Shaila Catherine states that by doing this we are protecting ourselves from the dangers of affection, preference, and elation that can arise from the first three Bhramavihāras. We think of the neutral person and bring thoughts to mind that show the likeness of all beings.

We can reflect on karma and say, "Beings are the owners of their deeds, whose, if not theirs, is the choice by which they will become happy." Or we can contemplate the three Dharma gates: "This person like me suffers, this person like me experiences the impermanence of all things, and this person like me is void of a permanent self." By doing these reflections first to the neutral person, then to the respected person, then the dear person, then the hostile person, then all sentient beings, and finally, ourselves, we break the barriers that causes discrimination and gain a feeling of non-preference for any being, including ourselves. Another nice

practice that we can use in daily life is to watch people we see on the street or in the shops, etc. See what our conditioned response is to different people. We will see that certain people we are more prone to judge than others, this is our nature. We can practice sending every person we see on the street kind thoughts and smiling at them regardless of who they are, and how we may feel towards them. By doing simple practices like this we can develop a non-preference to people and strengthen the peacefulness inside of us and in the world.

I would like to close with a little poem I found on Access to Insight. The author is referenced as Lord Horder. It says,

"It's easy enough to be pleasant,
when life flows along like a song,
but the man worthwhile is the man who can smile
when everything goes dead wrong."

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Standing Buddha sculpture overlooking MABA
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BUFFALO LODGE

The Buffalo Lodge, finished in 2011, serves as a residential hall for the male monastics on a daily basis, and for male practitioners during retreats, as well as a classroom on the lower level. In recent years, Buddhist workshops were routinely held in this building. It is fully furnished with four individual bedrooms, one loft, three full-baths, a modern kitchen, and a laundry room. Master Jìrú resides here in a separate single room that faces the front gate.

The building was originally referred to as “The Humble Cottage,” then later as “The Monk House,” but in 2016 adopted the name “Buffalo Lodge,” as it serves as a sanctuary for one to practice concentrating in meditation despite the mind’s stubborn nature.

The Buffalo Lodge was so named after Master Jìrú gave a series of talks on the teachings of Ven. Master Fǎróng of Niútóu Mountain. Niútóu means Ox or Buffalo head. In Asia, there is the domesticated water buffalo, while in America we have the bison buffalo.

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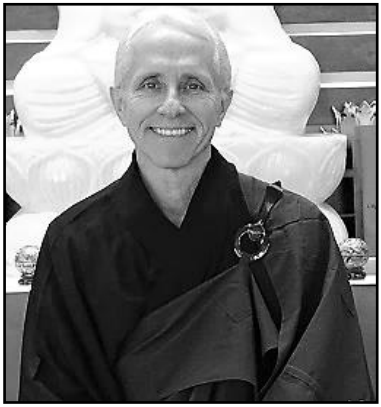
Finding Balance and Calmness with Meditation



Xiǎnjí Lee Patton
Lay Dharma Teacher

My name is Steven Lee Patton, I was born in Springfield Missouri in 1954. When I was about six we moved to Memphis Tennessee. My dad was a Trainmaster for the Frisco Railroad. My dad had a big heart. At Thanksgiving and Christmas, he would seek less fortunate families around us and leave food baskets on their front stoop. He took me with him on these runs of charity. He would never let the people see who was leaving the items for them.

Growing up in Memphis there was strict segregation. We used to be able to ride the passenger trains for free because my dad worked for the railroad. I have a vivid memory of two separate drinking fountains at the train station. One for the whites and one labeled "colored." When I asked my dad why there were two drinking fountains he said it grows out of ignorance. I always drank from the colored water fountain, even as a young boy I challenged authority or maybe it was a secret thought, if they didn't want me to do it, it was probably better I did.

Perhaps it was from my Father I developed a sense of compassion and empathy for those suffering. My Mom contributed to my sense of standing up for what I believed in. Both my parents instilled a sense of fearlessness in me. Some people flee from danger I'm the kind of person that will run towards it. I am a trial lawyer and have practiced since 1982. One day, many years ago, in St. Louis County Circuit Court, I was waiting for the docket to be called by Judge Tony Eberwine. The court room was full when suddenly outside in the hall there was a massive dash by a throng of people, into the corner of the building, where there was no exit. Just as suddenly, a friend and fellow lawyer, Scott Pollard, burst through the double doors into the courtroom. He shouted, "They're shooting!" The Judge told everyone to evacuate the courtroom so we headed out the back doors. There were two exits on either side of the Judge's bench. My friend Scott went out one door, and I the other, and we met in the hall behind the courtroom. I asked him what was going on and he said, "He killed my client." My question, suspending my empathy for the victim, "Was anyone else shot?" Scott said, "I was," and opened his jacket slightly, moving his tie, where I saw a bullet hole in the middle of his chest. My immediate thought, Scott is dying and he doesn't know it; he's running on adrenaline and will collapse at any moment. I took him by the arm followed the clerk, Sue, to the Judge's chambers, where we stood behind her while she unlocked the door. The hallway where we stood made a 90° turn to the right at the Judges door heading off to the other corner of the building. This is the back hallway behind all courtrooms.

As Scott and I stood behind Sue, who was fumbling with her key, I looked to the right. There a 55- to 60-year-old man in a blue blazer was shooting down the hallway running parallel to the hallway we were in but on the opposite side of the building. My thought was, it was a bailiff protecting us from the shooter. When Scott saw this "bailiff," he exclaimed, "That's the guy that shot me!" Almost simultaneous with this statement from Scott, the shooter at the end of the hall turned, made eye contact with us, and started

running right toward us down the hall. It was at that time I saw two handguns, one in each hand, as he pumped the air with his fists, getting ever closer to us. Sue got the door open, we went in, and she locked up behind us. The shooter, Kenneth Baumrute, ran to the thick solid door which led to our sanctuary, beating on it with the pistol grip of one of his guns. The gun grip left impressions in the wood of the door, we discovered afterwards. Of course, we didn't invite the shooter in with us. Instead, I took Scott into the Judge's office, sat him in the Judge's chair, and began compression on his chest wound.

We only had paper towels, so I folded them and made about a one-inch thick compression bandage, and pressed it as tight as I could against the wound. When I changed the bandage after it had soaked through, which it did several times, I noticed that there was no sucking sound. There was no profusion of pumping blood, so I began to question what kind of a wound I was dealing with. Soon I found another wound at the base of the right side of Scott's chest wall. I asked Chris Taylor, the public defender, who was in the room with us, to check Scott's suit coat for an exit bullet hole, which she did find. We soon determined, that when Scott's client was shot in the neck as she sat at the counsel's table in the courtroom, Scott was addressing the Judge. Scott turned to his client, just as the shooter fired a round at Scott: the shot entered the front of his chest, without ever penetrating his chest wall. Because of Scott's angle to the shooter, the bullet skimmed around his chest wall and exited the right lower portion of his rib cage. During this entire ordeal, I had no sense of danger, or need to do anything but help my friend.

While this rampage left a deep impression on me, another event in my life caused me great fear and depression. A person I had done business with for years decided he would not do business with me anymore, and instructed me I could no longer do the work I had always done. This person sued me numerous times; it ended up costing me $215,000.

We eventually settled the last of the lawsuits, and six weeks later this deeply troubled person took his own life with a bullet. It was during this time I discovered the stress relieving miracle of mindfulness meditation. Meditation helped me retain my sanity, and drew me toward inquiries into Buddhism about seven years ago. I started meditating in 2010 with 20 minutes a day. Very soon I was sitting for two 20 minute sessions. At present, I sit for 35 minutes in the early morning and another 35 minutes in the afternoon. My practice has consisted of loving kindness meditation and meditation on the body. Meditation helps me maintain a balanced life and calm mind. My blood pressure and heart rate have lowered as a result of meditation practice.

My teachers along the path of Buddhism have been Dr. Donald Sloane, Master Jìrú, Venerable Kōngshí, Venerable Kōngyán, Venerable Zhàozhàn and Sherrie McMillan. I have also read many books on Buddhism which have been helpful. Two of the most important books I use are: *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, and *Mindfulness in Plain English*.

I found MABA from a friend. My first visit was in 2010. My impression was one of acceptance, kindness, and warmth. It took me until March 28, 2014 to take the Precepts Vows. I decided to take the vows as it was the next logical step in the path. My Bodhisattva Vows were taken in March 2017. This is when I became a vegetarian. I like to think of myself as a kindergarten Buddhist because I have so much to learn. The book I just finished recently is *Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain and Body*. One of my favorite quotes is:

> "Morality and good deeds are unfailing investments.
> Compassion and love make an impenetrable shield."

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Wǒ bù zhīdào (I Don't Know): A Beginner's Mind

Xiǎnhuān Francesca Williams
Lay Dharma Teacher

When I was a child, I thought I could be perfect. Forty years later, I learned what that meant. As I sat down to write this bio, I didn't know what to say first, a common writer's dilemma: where to begin? That I discovered MABA because a friend's nephew had found Buddhism in prison? That I was a Buddhist child but didn't start formally practicing until I turned 50? What I've realized since beginning my formal practice? All good stories, to be sure, but I'll start with my only memory of first grade, my first day:

I walked down the hall of a red brick building I had never seen, hand in hand with my mother. She led me to a door, where a strangely dressed woman stood. A Catholic nun in full habit–only her face and hands were visible–she bent down to greet me with a welcoming smile. She had a radiance about her: joyful, serene, beautiful. I thought she was perfect, and I wanted to be like her.

By the time I was in the second grade, I knew I wanted to be a teacher: to learn, and share what I knew with others. Over the years, I found myself always willing to lend a hand, supporting others in

their endeavors, and keeping a compassionate outlook long before I knew what the word meant. I never did become a schoolteacher, that wasn't where my path led. But as an autodidact, I learned from every situation, every person, every job, every place I lived. I soaked it all in, trying to find beauty and goodness in everything, no matter how mundane. I listened to the animals, watched the trees, felt the earth beneath my bare feet.

Even as a small child, when someone was suffering I could see it on their face, hear it in their voice; I felt their pain as if it were my own. My most fervent wish was for them to stop suffering, and I did what I could to help, even if it was only a quiet look, a touch, or silly words. Merely being present is sometimes the most important thing we can do for others, I later learned.

A few years ago, a woman I hadn't heard from since high school sent me an email. She wanted to thank me for having been her friend. She had transferred to my school mid-way into our Junior year, and sat next to me in class; I started talking to her. What I didn't know was that she was miserable, and so lonely without her friends that it was almost unbearable. Her email said that if it hadn't been for me, she would've stopped going to school. She said I saved her life. We were only friends for a few months, but somehow, I made things better for her. And she remembered that kindness for more than 35 years; I had no idea. She made my day. Our words impact others in ways we never imagine.

When I turned 50, I decided to do 50 things I'd never done, in 50 consecutive days, and blog about them on my new website. What a lesson in project management! From donating blood, to firing an Uzi, to glass blowing, circus trapeze, and a glider flight, I found myself interacting with people who were passionate about their interest, and eager to share their knowledge. It was a memorable experience. By far, the best thing I did was to attend Sunday services at MABA, on a beautiful summer day.

I knew nothing about MABA, and I had never been to a monastery. Having never meditated for 40 minutes, I didn't know what to expect. I struggled after about 25 minutes, but enjoyed the

quiet. So peaceful! As I listened to the Dharma Talk on Virtue and Contentment of Few Wishes, tears unexpectedly began streaming down my face. I was astonished: I truly had no idea other people thought that way! Closing my eyes, the tears continued as I sat and listened. The words were profound, and resonated deep within. After having spent decades living all over the USA, searching for answers to questions I didn't know, I knew I was now home.

The most important thing I've learned–since recognizing my inner Buddhist–is our purpose. A question no one could ever answer for me was, "Why are we here? What is our purpose in life?"

A few years ago, I spent hours every day reading while sitting next to my aging dog with separation anxiety. At that point, he couldn't get up on his own to find me, so I made sure to be nearby, which reassured him. Over those months, as my dear dog's body deteriorated, I read dozens and dozens of books at buddhanet.net, from all three baskets. One day, after a long sitting, I decided to lie down for a few minutes, and let my mind relax for a bit. No sooner had my head touched the pillow than three words softly popped into my head: "to gain knowledge." After more than 40 years–with ease and without a struggle–I finally had my answer! I had been eagerly chasing knowledge for my entire life, and the answer had always been in front of me, waiting to be acknowledged.

Eventually, my dog died at home as I watched, holding his paw, helpless. I considered that death always happened to others. Certainly, never to me. On the advice of a friend, I started reading *Being with Dying* by Roshi Joan Halifax. Her charnel ground story left me reeling: what a remarkable woman. Such courage and strength. One day, after finishing her book, I came to realize that I, too, would die someday. Not at all a sobering, or morbid, realization, it was wonderful! I became immensely happy–no longer burdened by death–liberated with my new understanding of life. Death *will* happen, and probably sooner than I would like. But to shed my used-up body anew, my heart filled with mettā, is nothing to fear. It is like a gentle, nourishing, rain.

At MABA, I have discovered my Bodhisattva path, and each step affords an opportunity to challenge myself in ways I hadn't known in the previous step. With a lifetime of experiences and my Buddhism to guide me, I have stepped up to my next challenge– with full confidence in the Triple Gem and joy in my heart–by becoming a lay teacher. With my deepest respect and admiration for the Venerables and the other teachers at MABA, I share with them the understanding that *being of benefit to all sentient beings* means leading a purposeful life. I never imagined that my life would have led me to Buddhism. But I cannot be more grateful, nor more fortunate, for the clarity I have found.

I frequently consider Ajahn Sumedho's words from his book, *Four Noble Truths*, wherein he explains the third part of the Third Noble Truth [SN 56:11]:

"When you've let something go, and allowed it to cease,
what you have left is peace."

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One of the many bee hives at MABA
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Living with Discernment

Xiănhuān Francesca Williams

October 2017

Good morning Master, Venerables, teachers, old friends, new friends, and friends I haven't met yet. Is anyone here for the first time? Hello. Welcome, I'm glad you're here. It's a little chilly, but a beautiful day for a drive in the country. I know you come with questions, and you will find answers here.

My name is Francesca Williams, and my Dharma name is Xiănhuān, which means manifesting joyousness, or showing joy. The name suits me, because I'm always happy when I'm at MABA. I've found that happiness has carried over into my daily life, not just on Sundays. And due to my Buddhist practice, my family and friends have noticed subtle changes in me because of that happiness. It makes them happier as well.

This fall the Dharma talks have been led by the junior lay teachers and lay teachers in training, of which I am one. We have been discussing how we can live a Buddhist life guided by teachings, such as those found in the Noble Eightfold Path. It is the path prescribed by the Buddha leading to the cessation of suffering, and is composed of three parts:

1) The morality (sīla in Pali) of Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood,

2) The concentration (samādhi in Pali) of Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration,

3) And the wisdom (paññā in Pali, or prajñā in Sanskrit) of Right View and Right Intention.

Typically defined as wisdom, which is a noun, there is a more accurate definition for the word paññā, and that is discernment, which is a verb. Wisdom and discernment are used somewhat interchangeably in Buddhist texts; it just depends on who's doing

the translation. Venerable Master Yìnshùn is more precise when he tells us that, "Wisdom relies on 'discernment to be its nature."

Today I will be speaking to you about how we can apply the Buddha's teachings on discernment to our lives. The teachings serve as a guidepost on our way to ultimate liberation. Liberation from suffering.

The Buddha was a teacher who led by example. Although we may not think so, we are also teachers who lead by example. Sometimes we are good examples, and sometimes we're not. Our task is to understand the difference, so we can make good decisions. When we follow the Buddha's teachings, we learn how we can live a more confident life and thus be a better example to others. This will lead to happiness, for us and those whose lives we touch.

From the first two verses of the Dhammapada:

> "If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts, suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox.
>
> "If with a pure mind a person speaks or acts, happiness follows him like his never-departing shadow."

It's that simple.

To purify our minds, we need to work diligently to eradicate the defilements of greed, anger, and delusion in ourselves. We do that by living with discernment.

When I began writing this talk, I had thought my focus would be on Right View and Right Intention, which are part of cultivating wisdom on the Noble Eightfold Path. As I reviewed my notes and began writing, I realized that morality, concentration, and wisdom all require discernment.

But most importantly, discernment relies on Right Mindfulness (sati). Everything we think, say, or do, requires discernment. Cultivating discernment lowers stress, and gives us insight into the true meaning of things we think, say, and do.

In short, discernment allows us to become calmer, and think more clearly. Purposely. With this mindfulness comes happiness. If you only remember one word from my talk today, I would like it to be sati, which means mindfulness. One of MABA's dogs is named Sati. He's a puppy, so hasn't cultivated much mindfulness yet. He will learn, in his own way, in his own time. As we all do.

When we can think with a more correct view of the world, it gives us freedom from our delusions. With that comes wisdom, prajñā.

When we see what the Eightfold Path holds for us, we see that the path is clear – there is no danger when we stay on the path. When we step off the path, the unseen holds danger.

What is discernment?

According to dictionary, discernment is the ability to judge, or perceive, well.

Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo says that, "Discernment refers to discriminating knowledge, clear comprehension, knowledge in line with the truth."

This means that discernment is the ability to see something for what it is, without emotional attachment. Someone with a discerning eye simply understands. A discerning mind, perceives. Sees with an eye of discernment, paññā-cakkhu in Pali.

From the Anguttara Nikāya, the Buddha said there are four qualities of a person with great discernment:

> "I declare a person endowed with four qualities to be one of great discernment, a great man. Which four?
>
> "There is the case, brahman, where he practices for the welfare and happiness of many people and has established many people in the noble method, i.e., the rightness of what is admirable, the rightness of what is skillful.
>
> "He thinks any thought he wants to think, and doesn't think any thought he doesn't want to think. He wills any resolve he wants to will, and doesn't will any resolve he

doesn't want to will. He has attained mastery of the mind with regard to the pathways of thought.

"He attains – whenever he wants, without strain, without difficulty – the four jhānas that are heightened mental states, pleasant abidings in the here-and-now.

"With the ending of mental fermentations – he remains in the fermentation-free awareness-release and discernment-release, having directly known and realized them for himself right in the here-and-now."

The Buddha instructed his son Rahula:

Before you do something, he tells Rahula, ask yourself, "What's the intention here? Why am I doing this? Is it going to be an action that leads to suffering or not?"

Thanissaro Bhikkhu explains: "Only if the intention looks good should you act on it. Then, while you're acting, you check the results of your action. After the action is done you check again, because some results are immediate, other results are long term.

"Conviction in karma focuses your intention at the right spot and it gets you asking the right questions. Heedfulness gives urgency to your investigation. And the two of them (conviction and heedfulness) together lead to discernment.

"Discernment focuses on actions in terms of cause and effect, and works at developing greater and greater skill in acting, to the point where your actions are so skillful that they lead to the Deathless."

The Dhammapada tells us that the Deathless (amata in Pali) means that we have attained enlightenment, and are finally free from the cycle of repeated births and deaths.

In *The Eye of Discernment: An Anthology from the Teachings*, Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo discusses Right View (sammā diṭṭhi):

"To believe that there's no good or evil … is Wrong View – a product of faulty thinking and poor discernment,

seeing things for what they aren't. So, we should abandon such views and educate ourselves, searching for knowledge of the Dhamma and associating with people wiser than we, so that they can show us the proper path. We'll then be able to reform our views and make them Right….

"Discernment comes from observing causes and effects. If we know effects without knowing causes, that doesn't qualify as discernment. If we know causes without knowing effects, that doesn't qualify, either. We have to know both of them together with our mindfulness and alertness."

He continues: "Discernment is of three kinds –

1) Sutamaya-paññā: (is Pali meaning) discernment that comes from studying. Listening, paying attention, taking notes, asking questions, and taking part in discussions, so as to become quick-witted and astute."

This means that we educate ourselves by first learning the basics, and then learning how to put them together. We use our senses to teach us about the world around us.

2) "Cintamaya-paññā: (is Pali meaning) discernment that comes from reflecting. This refers to thinking and evaluating so as to learn the meaning and truth of one's beginning education."

This means that we consider what we've learned and decide whether or not to accept it as true.

3) "Bhavanamaya-paññā: (is Pali meaning) discernment that comes from developing the mind."

This means that as we focus our concentration on our meditation practice, wisdom will arise. In the Ānāpānasati Sūtta – Mindfulness of Breathing, the Buddha instructs us: "Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out."

Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo says that "… These things can be known by means of the discernment that arises exclusively and directly within us and is termed the eye of discernment, or the eye of Dhamma: the eye of the mind, awakening from its slumbers.

"Discernment that comes from studying and reflecting are theory, and can give only a preliminary level of knowledge. It's like a person who has awakened but has yet to open his eyes. Discernment that comes from developing the mind, though, is practice, is like waking up and seeing the truth. We can clearly see stress, its cause, its disbanding, and the Path to its disbanding."

Here he's describing the Four Noble Truths.

How do we live with discernment?

We lead by example. Everything we do shows others our beliefs. Our choices in what we buy, what we eat, where we go, is a vote in support of that thing. Support those things that you believe in your heart are wholesome and correct.

You know in your heart if something is good or bad for you. Do you go along with your friends or do you take a stand when you see something isn't right? If you say something, chances are your friends will agree. That's leading by example.

Last week MABA participated in the Buddhist Global Relief's annual Walk to Feed the Hungry in Tower Grove Park. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi says it most succinctly: "The walk demonstrates our conviction that if any of us suffers from lack of essential resources– if any of us goes hungry, faces empty cupboards, or has to bear the cries of our hungry children–we all suffer."

As I walk on the Bodhisattva path, vows I've taken include refraining from trading in arms, gambling, and from taking intoxicants. My attempts at a socially responsible investment portfolio reflects those values. I vow to be of benefit to others.

In that way, I buy school supplies and gently used winter coats for children I'll never meet, and donate to my town's food pantry, who provide food backpacks for 106 food insecure children who might otherwise go hungry on the weekend.

A few years ago, I found out the children who lived next door to my godmother had no books of their own, and their father told me they weren't readers. I read a lot as a child, so wanted to encourage them to read, but how? I found book fairs, and went on the last day of their sale, in the last hour, and bought all the children's books they had left. I took them home, cleaned them up, and started giving them away. In six months, I spent about $100 for over 2,000 books. Every week I would visit my godmother, and bring books to the girls, to slowly build their library. That summer, they would run out to greet me, and eagerly ask about the books I had brought for them. They ended up with about 300 books, and read all summer. That fall, their father told me they were now readers. I smiled and nodded.

I filled Little Free Libraries, and took books and Leap Pads to a local church, where they tutor children in an after-school program.

Small things we might take for granted, like a book, can make a big difference in someone's life. You see a need and fill it if you can. Most of us think about what we stand to gain by helping someone, when that's the last thing that should be on our minds. We should always endeavor to give selflessly.

As my parents got older, their cognitive faculties declined, and my life changed when our parent-child relationship flipped. They made me be the grown-up, and I was now taking care of them. Since they weren't functioning well, I realized that I needed to be their moral compass, as they had been my moral compass when I was a child.

My father and I would go out to dinner several nights a week, and he began saying unkind things, sometimes about others who were within earshot, and laugh. Instead of laughing at his inappropriate comments, I gently admonished him, "That's not nice." He would grin sheepishly, and look down, much as a child would. He knew he was being inappropriate, and he was testing me, to see what he could get away with. After a few times, his behavior improved, and he stopped making unkind comments when we were together.

A few weeks before my mother died, she started singing *The Three Little Fishes*, which I remembered from my childhood. Except now, when she got to the last word, dam, she kept repeating it: dam, dam, dam, dam, dam. With an amused smile, she looked at me like a little girl and laughed. I smiled back.

Why did I scold my father and not my mother? They both displayed inappropriate behavior. I scolded Dad because he was intentionally being hurtful towards others. Mom was merely laughing at her silliness, and I knew she wasn't hurting anyone.

Thanissaro Bhikkhu tells us that, "You have to learn how to ask yourself the right questions of the present moment, in particular, 'What are your intentions right now, and what results do they have?' They have to be placed in context, the context of the question of skillfulness:

> "What are you doing?
> What are your intentions?
> What are the results of your actions based on those intentions?
> Are you content with them, or do you want better?"

From the *Dhammapada*:

> "When you see with discernment, 'All fabrications are inconstant' — you grow disenchanted with stress. This is the path to purity."

Fabrication is an invention, intentional actions. Or a lie. Inconstant is another way of saying impermanent (anicca in Pali). So, all actions are impermanent. Stress is unsatisfactoriness, or suffering (dukkha in Pali).

Purity. When we cleanse our minds of wrong views, wrong speech, and wrong actions, we can think with a pure mind. We have clarity, no doubt that what we are doing is wholesome and correct.

From the *Dhammapada*:

> "When you see with discernment, 'All fabrications are stressful' – you grow disenchanted with stress. This is the path to purity."

So, all actions are unsatisfactory.

From the *Dhammapada*:

> "When you see with discernment, 'All phenomena are not-self' – you grow disenchanted with stress. This is the path to purity."

Phenomena. Phenomenon. It's something that's observable, a thing. Non-self. Refers to the Buddhist doctrine that there is no permanent and abiding self, or soul (anatta in Pali).

The *Dhammapada* commentary states that: "All states of being are without a self. When this is realized through insight, one achieves detachment from suffering. This is the path to total freedom from suffering." Anatta is a difficult concept to grasp, and is best left for another day.

Thanissaro Bhikkhu says that, ultimately, "Your quest for discernment has… to be informed by the right questions, by the right qualities of mind, by the rigor you bring to your attention to what you're doing, by your willingness to set the highest possible standards for yourself, your unwillingness to settle for a happiness that falls under the Three Characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and non-self. This is how discernment comes about."

In conclusion,

We should resolve to make a determined effort to become more discerning, and be persistent in refining our minds.

If we can be flexible, and see things for what they are, instead of the way we want them to be, then we have taken a step towards being more discerning.

If we are patient, and seek the truth with a discerning mind, then we will always have confidence in our thoughts, words, and actions.

As we walk the path and practice with diligence, we will discern that we are being of benefit to others.

Discernment shows us how to live a joyful life. When one lives with discernment, one lives with clarity and liberation.

Thank you for your attention today, I enjoyed speaking to you. Now placing our hands together at heart's center, please join me in reciting the Four Immeasurables:

May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness.
May all beings be free from suffering and the cause of suffering.
May all beings never be separated from the altruistic joy which is free from suffering.
And may all beings live in the great equanimity, which is free from attachment, aversion, and ignorance.

Thank you.

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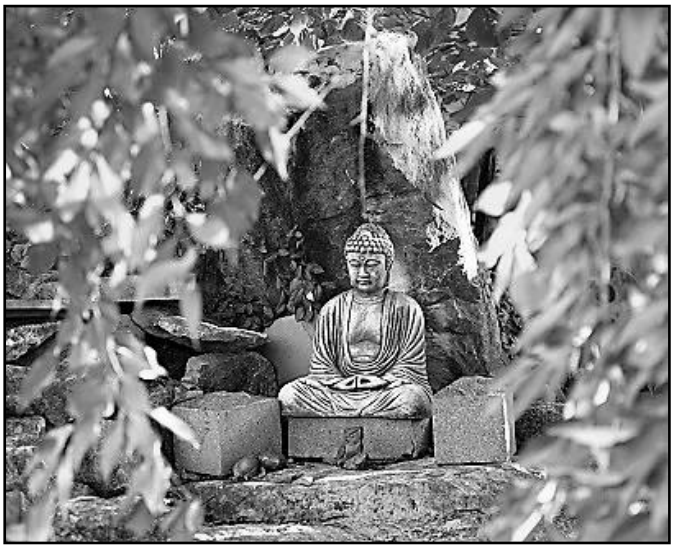

A Buddha sculpture sits next to one of the koi ponds at MABA
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Learning from Life

Xiǎngě Maggie Joyce
Lay Dharma Teacher

My name is Maggie Joyce. I am a relatively non-descript, middle-aged woman who first came to MABA about six years ago, in 2012. I have had two careers in my life. One as an actor, and the other more recently, as a Flight Attendant. As I am writing this, I have been without work for two years due to my struggle with Stage IV colon cancer. I am overcoming this unfortunate karma splendidly, however, thanks in no small part to the love and nurturing of my sangha, reading, and hearing the Dharma, and practicing meditation. I am almost as good as new now, and it is my plan to return to work in the near future.

I was raised a Roman Catholic, but I was always curious about all the world's religions, and read a good deal about Buddhism. I viewed the Buddha as one of the world's greatest philosophers. Also, as an actor, I trained in various meditation techniques to enhance my instrument, but my meditative activity was strictly secular in context. To add another precursor into the mix, I had traveled quite a bit. My favorite destination was Nepal.

On 9/11/2001, I was a Flight Attendant specializing in domestic flights for American Airlines. I frequently flew out of New York and Boston. On that fateful day, I was based in Chicago. I had a rare day off in my schedule, and decided to rest up at my base and not to attempt to fly home to St. Louis and back just for a few hours. Exhausted, I was planning to catch up on some much-needed sleep.

Back in 2001, very few people had cell phones. I had a pager and a calling card for public phones. Mid-morning found me sound asleep, when suddenly my pager seemed angry: soundly vibrating and vibrating again and loudly, shrilly, alarming. My brother had dictated a message to my pager demanding to know if I was okay. Numerous other friends and family had left their phone numbers wildly. Reluctantly, and somewhat confused as to what the fuss was about, I picked up the phone and the operator told me that the phone lines were down. "Why?" I asked. "Which phone lines? Where?"

"Look at a TV," she responded in a monotone, then disconnected.

AA Flight 11 was a flight I worked frequently, but now I couldn't even think about going back to work. Flight Attendants were the first to die on that fateful day, and when they killed my friends, it seemed they killed a part of me. The working part of me. The part that was left just couldn't go back on an airplane.

The Company grounded all its flights. They, after a time, said that those of us that couldn't return were excused. They contracted with mental health professionals to contact us. Eventually the flights resumed, but I still couldn't work.

I couldn't cry for weeks, but when I started, I couldn't stop. Through tearful eyes I read Buddhist authors compulsively. I was searching for a religion. I was searching for a way not to hate. I wanted to soothe murderous minds. I wanted to integrate the Three Treasures into my practice.

I began to meditate daily, and eventually returned to work. I went to sanghas all over the country. I went to sanghas all over St. Louis. Every type of Buddhism was explored–every stone thoroughly turned every which way. I settled on a secular sangha

group and spent a year with them, but after a while, I began to seek more. I wanted to read more ancient prose. I wanted to concentrate on the actual words of the Buddha. This is when I discovered MABA.

Buddhism has changed my life considerably. Many practitioners feel the same way. I am kinder, gentler, less judgmental, humbler and I feel like MABA is my real family. The folks at MABA share my priorities. Through them, I am connected to the universe.

I rarely miss a MABA retreat and am looking forward to continuing participating. I always learn a lot about the Practice whether the retreat is for beginners or more advanced students. Now that the Blue Lotus House is complete, I am looking forward to meeting new people. Having the additional space will attract folks from further away, which will only enhance the wonderful blends of culture that exist at MABA.

I started meditating about 41 years ago. The type of meditation I did back then was to relax my body and clear my mind. Most actors do this type of meditation to prepare for a performance. The point of this type of meditation is to focus on what your character wants without the distraction of interruptive thoughts.

Today, I meditate for about two hours daily merely because I, and those around me, benefit from my practice. I primarily practice Vipassana and Samadhi in the classic position, but also listen to daily Dharma talks and occasionally practice walking, standing, and lying down. Most importantly, I try to live my life mindfully. There have been many challenges in my life. Since I have begun living by the Buddha's words, I am more able to face these difficulties with grace.

The most important teachers in my life are people in general. I find there is something to learn from everyone. My job is to calm people when they are under stress, and I find that my Buddhist practice allows me to get better and better at these challenges. At MABA, I have learned a lot from all the teachers. I especially enjoy the more junior teachers. Stacey Winterton and Sherrie McMillan [now a senior teacher] are two of my favorites, as they both teach

practicality and in a fluent way. I find teachers that teach about the history of Chán Buddhism to be invaluable in my understanding and development, as well; Don ‘Shūshu’ Sloane and Katty Choi are especially knowledgeable. Master Jìrú, of course, is the most important teacher in my life. He lives a remarkable life and, although his talks prove invaluable and deeply fascinating, it is his presence from which I learn the most.

I took the Five Precepts fairly soon after I arrived at MABA and the Bodhisattva vows about a year after. I had initial difficulty becoming a vegetarian and a teetotaler fairly soon after taking the Precepts. However, it didn’t take me very long to say goodbye to these vices. The trick, for me, was that when I slipped, I took a lot of time to reflect on the reasons why. And so the slips became fewer and then non-existent as my Practice grew deeper. Taking the Bodhisattva vows was a natural progression after becoming comfortable with the Precepts. Today, I realize how important all these vows are to me. They are the lifeline of my Practice. Because I keep my vows, the rest of my Practice follows.

I am currently taking a course in the ancient language, Pali, in order to complement my study at MABA. I have always had a huge interest in linguistics, so this course, although challenging, is right up my alley.

A personal quote that resonates deeply with me lately is “Don’t hate hate.” I have founded a website called “Politics, Religion, and Other Intelligent Conversation for Flight Attendants.” We are well over a thousand members from all walks of life. The job of Flight Attendant can be done alongside other professions. We have doctors, lawyers, artists, political activists–the list is endless. We are all in a unique position to observe the zeitgeist of the various stressors our society faces in real time. The conversation is always lively, and it is because of this discourse, the saying, “Don’t hate hate,” occurred to me. It has been my motto. Many people disagree with me about this. Hate is an all too common emotion. It is my hope to have those with diverse viewpoints really connect with each other in a compassionate way, to positively influence negative energy which has permeated parts of our world.

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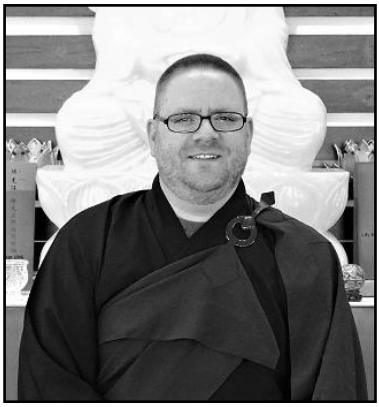
The Sovereign Mind



Xiănchū Cory Russell
Lay Dharma Teacher

My name is Cory Russell. I've been an I.T. professional for the last 7 years, and live in Saint Charles Missouri. I spend a lot of time as an amateur photographer and astronomer, and spend as much free time as I can backpacking in the Ozark Mountain areas of Missouri with my wife and friends From 1997 to 2001 I was in the Air Force. While I cultivated a lot of positive ethics and work habits, I walked away from it with an unrealistic set of standards that ultimately caused a great deal of suffering and unsatisfactoriness in my life.

After years of struggling, in 2001 I picked up a copy of Jon Kabat Zinn's book *Mindfulness for Beginners.* It sat on my shelf for three years before I opened it. After my father passed away in December of 2013, I handled it very poorly and was not only causing myself a great deal of suffering and issues, I was also projecting it on to others around me. A few months later, in March of 2014, I decided to read the book I had purchased a few years back, and my journey into Buddhism began. I had no idea that the book I was reading was influenced by Buddhism, or that it would introduce me to meditation and forever change me.

In April of 2014 I decided that I would explore Buddhism a little deeper, and stumbled upon MABA after a quick internet search. I decided to come and visit. I'm pretty sure I just stared at a wall for 40 minutes during my first attempt at meditation. Even though I never fully achieved any level of concentration, he very first time I sat down I noticed a change. I now meditate at the very least 30 minutes a day.

Meditation has brought a lot of calmness to my life, it has improved my ability to focus at work, and my overall demeanor has improved. The little things no longer bother me like they did. Occasionally I'll do a guided meditation, but my overall practice is focused on mindfulness of the breath, as wherever I go, I always have it. It doesn't require anything, or anyone to give instructions, and I can practice it anywhere.

I have been attending MABA as much as possible since my first visit, and have participated in as many retreats as my schedule allows. I typically make it to three retreats a year. The retreats at MABA are very well put together, with offerings from beginners to an experienced meditator or Buddhist. It is an amazing situation to be able to attend MABA. The serenity of its location and surrounding environment is enough to warrant a visit from anyone, but what keeps me coming back to MABA is the sangha. The community at MABA is very knowledgeable and compassionate. Master Jìrú's goal of having a teaching community in the United States is an inspiring thing to me. I'm hoping that work will one day align in a manner that I'll be able to attend longer retreats at MABA.

The more I learned, the more Buddhism made sense. I took the precepts in April of 2015. Buddhism just fits me like a glove. It's a guide to peace, points a way to happiness, and teaches love and compassion for all living beings. It has made a massive change in the way I talk and interact with people, and how I exist in this life. The impact of taking these vows and refuge in the Triple Gem really deepened my practice. In 2017, I decided to take the Bodhisattva vows to further my practice and to put others first. Taking these vows was a huge step in some cases. There were some major

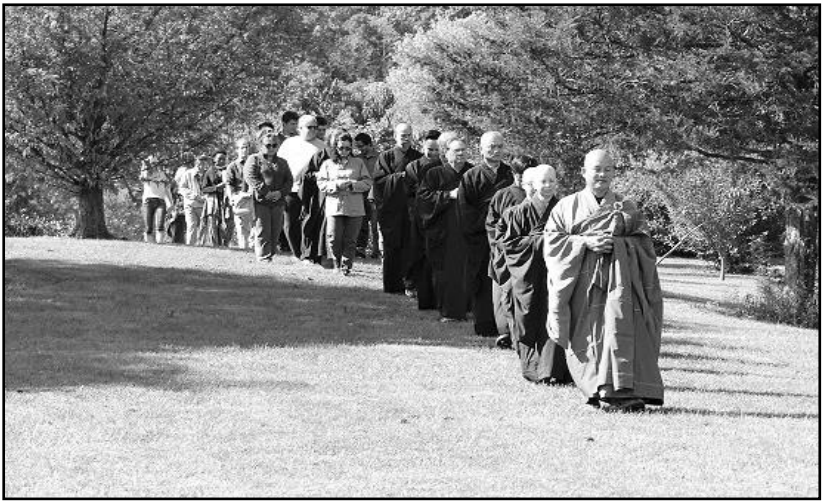
lifestyle changes that happened after taking the Bodhisattva vows. Some of which possess moral quandaries. Most everyone I know is aware that I have become a Buddhist but for the vast majority, they don't know what that entails. For example, the precept to not eat meat. I have been in a couple of situations where a friend or family member was unaware that was a vow I took and they went out of their way to fix me a plate of food, or a meal, where. I am stuck with a choice of upholding my vow or do I potentially upset the person who went out of their way for me.

My decision to become a teacher came rather easily. There is so much benefit to have the ability to teach others who want to learn the dharma. It is part of the reason I took the Bodhisattva vows in the first place. I have the chance to help those who seek to learn the Dharma and put them before myself. Having the privilege to teach also gives the opportunity to better learn the Dharma myself.

I recently finished reading Venerable Matara Sri Nanarama's *"The Seven Stages of Purification and Insight Knowledges,"* which I used for my first Dharma talk on purification. Currently I am furthering my education in Vasubandhu's Yogācāra. The mind-only philosophy really can transform modern life and how everyone can see the world. My current reading on this matter is *"A Practitioner's Guide, Inside Vasubandhu's Yogācāra"* by Ben Connelly. I'm preparing for my next talk in 2018, so I have a few books lined up on Karma as well.

In my readings, the Buddhist concept of the mind fascinates and inspires me. In the working of Karma, its most important feature is the mind. All our words and deeds are colored by the mind or consciousness we experience at particular moments. When the mind is unguarded, bodily action is unguarded; speech is also unguarded; thought is unguarded as well. When the mind is guarded, bodily action is guarded; speech is also guarded; and thought is guarded.

"*By mind the world is led, by mind is drawn:*
And all men own the sovereignty of mind."



Procession led by the monastics to the Guānyīn Pavilion during MABA's annual Guānyīn Blessing Ceremony

Nothing Worthwhile is Ever Easy

Xiǎnbèi Bret Scott

Sangha Member

Bret Scott has been involved with Buddhism and MABA since 2010, not only participating in Dharma Talks, retreats, and study groups, but as a landscaper as well. He succinctly summarizes his practices experiences as: "No question I have found benefit through reflection, examination and contemplation. Practicing calming the mind and less self-centeredness (ego), also very beneficial. Karma, Cause & Effect, non-Duality, Mind; WOW!" Moreover, he adds:

> "You cannot help others without helping yourself.
> Nothing worthwhile is ever easy."

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Another view of a Buddha sculpture at MABA

Out of Deep Compassion

Xiănníng Toni Staicu
Sangha Member

My name is Toni Staicu, and my Dharma name is Xiănníng, which means "manifest serenity." I am originally from Romania, and emigrated to the USA in 1991. I currently live in Eureka, MO with my two children: Andra, who is a first-year student at SLU and lives on campus, and Andrei, who is a sophomore at Eureka High School. I am a registered dental hygienist and a Yoga and Pilates teacher. I enjoy travelling, cooking, baking, painting, making jewelry, sewing, knitting, and quilting.

As a young child living in countryside Romania, I experienced many traumatic events that seemed not to bother anyone else. My empathic sense and my compassion were great for animals as much as for humans. Back then, all well-off families were raising a pig to be sacrificed for Christmas. This would provide feast food for the Holy Day, and some would be saved for the cold, winter days. The day that my dad was planning to sacrifice the pig was a sacrilege to me. As I grew older, maybe around nine, I realized I could sleep over at my cousin's, and so I did. I also chose to not eat any meat;

however, my mom was insisting, so I knew eventually I would eat some since that's what was served. I also knew that there had to be more to life than suffering.

In my twenties, I became interested in Eastern philosophy and read the *Tao Te Ching*, Jiddu Krishnamurti and then the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, which lead me to become a yoga teacher, and prompted me to explore meditation. In my early forties, I studied Qigong with international master Lin Kai Ting.

In 2005, I first visited MABA, thanks to my Qigong teacher Ron Rain, who brought my family here for a visit. I loved the place and was attracted to it. However, raising kids and working prevented me from coming back until 2011, when I became a regular: I fell in love with the place, its mission, and its leaders. I took the precepts in 2013 and was given the Dharma name Xiǎnníng. Soon after, I joined the two-year teacher's training program led by Master Jìrú and supported by the senior teachers; I was later certified as a lay teacher.

In 2014, I took the Bodhisattva vows and continued to practice; I've participated in numerous short retreats and experienced several ten-day long retreats, including Vipassanā and mettā (loving kindness). I contribute and participate in the center's activities by organizing grocery shopping for the winter retreat, leading the morning study group, giving talks, leading yoga, cooking, and baking, sometimes for retreats as necessary.

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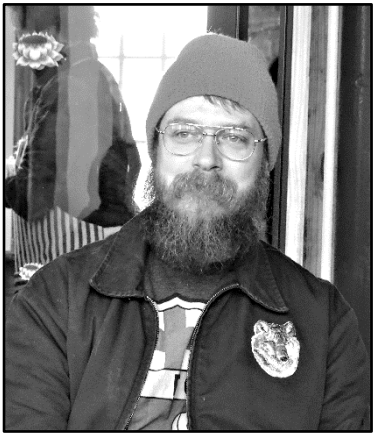
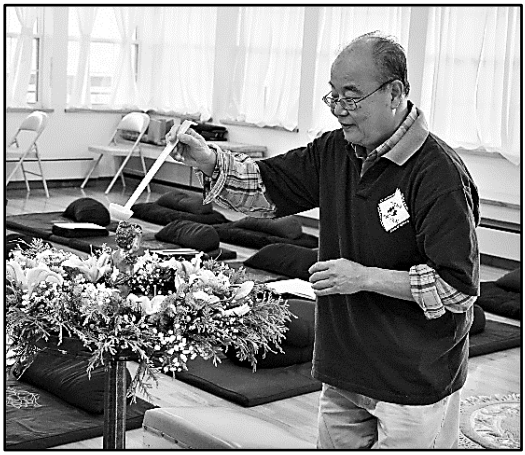
Some of Our Sangha Members



Xiănyào Ryan Green

Mr. Cuong Hoang

Chil Choi
Vesak Day



Some of Our Sangha Members

Hien Pham and Xiǎnjiā Joyce Frietze
Vesak Day

Xiǎnkān Brandon Carter

DÌZÀNG HALL

Dìzàng Hall is the largest Buddhist Memorial Hall in Mid-America, constructed in 2007. There are over 400 niches, each with a gold plaque delicately decorated with a relief of Dìzàng Púsà. This building's name pays respect to Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva (Dìzàng Púsà), best known for his relentless devotion to rescue his mother and all sentient beings from suffering in the infernal, exemplary conducts of filial piety by Chinese standard. In Buddhism, death is not the end of life. By creating this memorial hall, the monastic community is able to provide a place of peace in an auspicious building set on one of the highest rolling hillsides at the monastery.

Interior of Dìzàng Hall

In the center of the graceful, oval interior surrounded by golden memorial plaques, a 12-foot tall copper sculpture of Dìzàng Púsà *(pictured, left)* stands guard over those who have passed on. The Bodhisattva sculpture is surrounded by the burning flames of his vows to protect those who have died, holding the great Taoist staff, which symbolizes his protectorship of the six realms, and all beings in them. The sculpture stands in a tall alcove, guarding over the berths, and symbolizing our commitment as Buddhists to respecting and caring for those in our families who have passed on.

For those who wish to express their traditional family piety, or to feel the comfort knowing that they will reside after death under the mindful eye of a Buddhist Sangha, the Mid-America Buddhist Association provides reservations, burial arrangement assistance, interment and burial services, consecration of the ancestral plaque, eternal maintenance of the facility, daily chanting, annual memorial services and a selection of six different urns for those who wish to have a consecrated urn for their loved ones.

Dìzàng, the representation of the Vow to Liberate All Beings from the Lower Realms, carries a staff, which is used both to bang on the ground to warn tiny insects to not be harmed as he walks, and to pry open the gates of the hell realms to help those trapped to escape. Dìzàng is the only monastic member of the Four Great Bodhisattvas, who also include Guānyīn, Mañjuśrī, and Samantabhadra.

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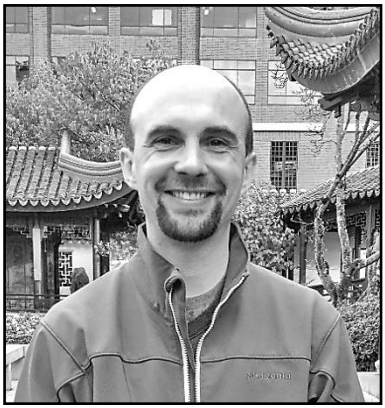
Sangha Friends

Living an Authentic Life



Kōngmù Michael Running
空目

Sometimes I marvel at having been given three different names at three different times in this life. My parents named me Michael Running at birth, my first monastic name when I was ordained in 2006 at the age of 29 was Reverend Sheridan, and when I came to MABA in the Fall of 2010, Master Jìrú gave me the Chinese name Kōngmù (空目). Currently, after leaving monastic life in late December 2013, I am back to being Michael. While each name represents a new phase in my own spiritual path, there is also an important continuity that I often reflect upon. To paraphrase Shakespeare, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name. . ." would still have to deal with his own karma! ☺ I was fortunate to spend three short, yet very meaningful, years as a monastic affiliated with the community of MABA from 2010–2013. In this short biography, I'll introduce how I encountered Buddhism, how I eventually arrived to MABA, and just a few of the many experiences to-date in my own Dharma practice.

I first began practicing Buddhism when I was 25 years old while in graduate school in my home state of Oregon. I began meditating at a local Soto Zen temple in May of 2000, and quickly began to immerse myself in the study and practice of the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva path. Over the next few years, I attended week-long retreats at Shasta Abbey, the Northern California monastery affiliated with the local temple I was practicing at. It was at this loving and spiritually-vibrant community with 25 full-time, celibate monastics (both men and women) that I first realized monastic life was a viable and potentially enriching life for me. I longed to commit myself to a wholesome life of spiritual development and service. After spending two years preparing my life and settling affairs, I moved to the monastery in early 2005 to begin my monastic journey.

After spending nearly six years at Shasta Abbey, I took advantage of an unexpected opportunity to change traditions in the Fall of 2010 and moved to MABA to become a student of Master Jìrú. I had met Shīfù a couple of years earlier when he spent some time at Shasta Abbey teaching the community Qigong. He was spiritual friends with the Abbot at Shasta, and both Vens. Kōngshí and Kōnghuàn had spent time at the monastery in previous years. In 2010, it was clear to me that I wanted to focus on the study and practice of Early Buddhism as found in the Pali Sūttas and Chinese Āgamas, wishing in particular to study the teachings of the 20th century Chinese monk Master Yìnshùn. Master Jìrú was an obvious and fitting teacher for me to study with, and he very kindly accepted my request to become his student and join the MABA community.

I spent the next six months, from November of 2010 to May of 2011, at MABA acclimating to the Chinese tradition. With Master Jìrú's support and encouragement, I began a nascent study of the Chinese language with hope of eventually becoming proficient enough to study Master Yìnshùn's works directly, as out of his vast corpus of writings, only a very select few had been translated into English. However, it quickly became clear that to truly learn Chinese, it was most efficient to live and study in a Chinese-

speaking culture. So, with the kind and generous support of Shīfù, I connected with the community of Dharma Drum Mountain (法鼓山) in Taiwan and moved there in May of 2011 to begin an intense period of Chinese language study. During my time in Taiwan, I was able to deepen my meditation practice through retreats at Dharma Drum and by studying forms of Insight meditation through various traditions as well.

Soon after arriving in Taiwan, I met and connected with a German scholar-monk from the Theravada tradition named Bhikkhu Analayo who came to do research at Dharma Drum's university. He focuses on comparison studies of the Pali sūttas and their Chinese parallels, providing insight into the earliest textual layers of Buddhists texts. In 2011, I began to assist Bhikkhu Analayo by helping to proof and edit his Chinese translations, something that I continue to do today.

For the next nearly two years in Taiwan, I focused nearly exclusively on learning Chinese. It was by far the hardest thing I've done in my life. However, I eventually (and somewhat surprisingly) managed to become fairly proficient in Chinese. I was able to take Higher Ordination (becoming a full Bhikshu) from March–April of 2013, something that had been a long-standing wish of mine. Being mostly proficient in Chinese allowed me to gain much from this two-month ordination retreat.

In the summer of 2013, I was also accepted into the monastic college that Master Yìnshùn started in the 1950s. This was a tremendous opportunity to focus nearly exclusively on Master Yìnshùn's works and the Chinese Agamas. My Chinese continued to improve, as all of our papers and presentations obviously needed to be in Chinese as well. I also met many dear Dharma brothers there who helped me greatly.

However, it was also during this time in the Fall of 2013 that I began to seriously question my life as a monk. It has become apparent that, as much as I loved the Dharma and a life committed to its expression, I had forsaken elements of myself that provide life-affirming and life-validating experiences. In other words, I saw

that I was living a life trying to fulfill expectations rather than one based upon authentic expression, which had been my primary and original motivation in becoming a monastic. After months of reflection and consultation with teachers, Shīfù, and Dharma friends, I made the very difficult decision to leave monastic life in late December of 2013. I moved back to my home state of Oregon to begin a new phase of life at the age of 38.

Today, nearly four years after returning to lay life, I am happily married to a very special woman and have a fun, creative, and confident 13-year old stepson. I have recently begun a Master's degree in counseling hoping to become a professional counselor to work with others find their own authentic and healthy self-expression in life. I am eager for this professional development, as I expect to bring core elements of my time as a monk into working with others.

I am often asked, "What did you learn as a monk?" My stock answer, which continues to inform much of my life today, is as follows:

"Never underestimate the value of kindness;
practice gratitude in daily life;
and trust in the resiliency of yourself and others,
and never give up on either."

Although I ultimately chose to leave monastic life, I am grateful every day for the rare and tremendous opportunity to have lived the life for nearly nine years. I am eternally grateful to Master Jìrú, Kōngshí Shīfù, Kōnghuàn Shīfù, my MABA friends, and all my other teachers and Dharma brothers and sisters who exemplify what the Buddha taught.

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Right View and the Middle Way–Part II

Kōngmù Mike Running

May 2011

This talk is a continuation of a talk I gave on April 3rd on a short Sūtta in the Saṃyutta Nikāya (the Connected Discourses) called the Kaccānagotta Sūtta. It is Sūtta number 12:15. And although I will add to some of the themes and teachings introduced in the first talk, today's really will be able to stand on its own. So, please do not worry about listening to the first one. In fact, if you are interested in learning more about Right View as I attempted to present in the first talk, I would suggest reading Bhikkhu Bodhi's excellent, concise book on the Noble Eightfold Path called *The Way to End Suffering*. It offers a much better treatment of the subject than I could ever pull together. In actual fact, one could easily speak about this particular Sūtta for weeks on end, so attempting to cover it in depth in just two talks is really an impossibility.

In the first talk, I spoke a bit about Dependent Co-arising, the Middle Way, and Right View, and how they are seen in the teaching of the Buddha. To offer a brief recap, Dependent Co-arising is a description of both the process and the content of the Buddha's enlightenment. It is the "regularity" and "stability" of Dependent Co-arising that the Buddha was awakened to, and how one can enter a profound state of peace through seeing the cessation of Dependent Co-arising to its completion.

Dependent Co-arising is an expansion of the second and third Noble Truths, which describe the cause and cessation of suffering. One of the most pithy and helpful ways to describe Dependent Co-arising is, "when this exists, that exists; with the arising of this, that arises." And, because Dependent Co-arising operates both in a forward direction, where causes create suffering, and in a reverse direction, where causes create the cessation of suffering, the Buddha also said, "when this does not exist, that does not exist; with the cessation of this, comes the cessation of that." It may sound a bit abstract, but this process is very intimate, personal, and cosmic in

scope. Dependent Co-arising occurs because of the emptiness of all phenomenon, mental and material. It is because things do not obstruct other things that Dependent Co-arising can function (what is obstructed are our expectations; everything that happens really is perfectly just).

The Middle Way isn't just a balance of two extremes, or a "middle ground" between indulgence and asceticism; it is actually the transcending any set of opposites. It is the "middle way" because it does not veer toward either side of a pair of opposites; it does not take on any of their characteristics. The Middle Way is according with this emptiness of all phenomenon.

For Right View, there are two primary kinds of Right View: mundane or ordinary, which largely consists of a deep understanding of the law of Karma; and supra mundane, or extra-ordinary, which penetrates the Four Noble Truths deeply. One of the things I failed to mention in the first talk is that Right View at this extra-ordinary level is actually a self-contradiction: Right View is not a view at all, but rather it is the absence of views. It is what is left when all of our interpretations and the activities of our perceptual consciousness cease. And, from the standpoint of views and perspectives, what Right View "sees" is the emptiness of all phenomenon, and how everything arises and ceases completely due to other conditions and factors. Again, Bhikkhu Bodhi's book will be a great resource for those who would like to know more.

Today, I'd like to go through the Kaccānagotta Sūtta, offering a meager commentary on certain aspects of its teaching. And then I would like to share some thoughts written by Master Yìnshùn on the Middle Way and Dependent Co-arising. Specifically, how we can begin to contemplate and reflect on this profound teaching of Dependent Co-arising. Without this contemplation of Dependent Co-arising, all of this just becomes worldly knowledge, and we miss out on the profound implications of the Buddha's teachings. As you may soon see, with this Sūtta and the implications of it, we will quickly approach the limits of language and concepts, and will only be able to hint at the ineffable aspects of the teaching contained

here. It is this ineffability that the contemplation of Dependent Co-arising aims at realizing.

Sūtta:

> At Savatthi, the Venerable Kaccānagotta approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side, and said to him, "Venerable sir, it is said, 'right view, right view.' In what way, Venerable sir, is there right view?"

Now Venerable Kaccānagotta, also known as Mahākaccāna, was one of the Great Disciples of the Buddha. He was named by the Buddha as the "Foremost in Doctrinal Exposition," which means he was able to explain the teaching very clearly and concisely. So, for him to be asking about Right View means that he is not asking from the perspective of mundane Right View; his question is already from a deep perspective. The Buddha's answer, speaking to where Venerable Kaccānagotta is at, is very profound and speaks of the Middle Way.

Sūtta:

> [The Buddha said,] "This world, Kaccāna, for the most part, depends upon a duality, upon the idea of existence and the idea of nonexistence."

"This world" means the rising and falling of our sensory experience; each moment, our senses contact sense objects, triggering a conscious awareness in the mind we call recognition or perception. The world is this momentary, moment-to-moment experience of sensory information (12:44); this is how "the world" is created, and how it ceases, because these conditions are impermanent and do and will cease. "This world" is also called the "world of formations," as we "form" or "fabricate," in the sense of manufacture, the world in our minds. This word in English, formations, is an important and very difficult word to translate. In Pali, it is "saṅkhāra," which refers to both the process of "forming,"

or putting together, as well as that which is "formed" or put together. It is one of the five skandhas, and is the source of our volition. So, "the world" is how we form, interpret, and respond to the experience of our senses. And, just to be clear, the mind in Buddhism is a sense faculty; so, even the affective qualities of our experience are "formations," they are formed by the combination of other factors. This means our suffering, our afflictions, and our happiness are all formations as well. They all arise, and they all cease.

This "origin" is not real existence, according to the Buddha, as explained by Master Yìnshùn. If it was real existence, something would endure forever, be unchanging and unaffected by change and unaffected by conditions. However, we all have to admit that nothing available to our senses exhibit unchangeableness. In this way, things exist but only conventionally, or conditionally; they exist to limited degree, because they all depend upon other conditions for this existence. When these conditions change, this thing changes or ceases also. So, it is not that things do not exist, for of course they do; but they exist in a way that is very different than our unnoticed assumptions.

Our experience, the Buddha is saying here, depends upon these two fundamental and often hidden assumptions: that what we perceive actually exists in a very real way; and/or that what we do not perceive, or cannot perceive, does not exist in any way (or what we perceive actually does not exist in any way). Most of our experiences are supported by the first assumption, that of "existence;" the "nonexistence" is a nihilistic view of the world, an assumption that things (people, events, emotions, feelings) do not exist once they have past, or are pure illusion and not exist in reality. Both of these views are incomplete and are based on limited observations and unskillful attention to the process and contents of the mind, according to the Buddha.

Existence is understood here to mean that something is independent, free, and perpetually a self of some kind; nonexistence means that there is nothing: no lasting phenomenon, and no consequences for our actions. Once we die, for example, that's it.

The only thing left of us are memories in other people's minds. Now generally we only can get a tangible sense of either of these views in ourselves when we encounter conditions that do not fit our expectations. Whenever excitement or disappointment arises, one or both of these views is the cornerstone of our feeling.

Note here that the translation says, "the idea of existence," "the idea of non-existence." Both are mental formations as well; constructs in the mind. This duality, between existence and nonexistence, is like the perpetual motion of a pendulum; the motion is what turns the wheel of birth and death. The continuation of the world depends upon this duality, is what the Buddha says. Both existence and nonexistence are contracts, or assumptions in the mind; the Buddha here shows us how to correctly perceive what is going on.

Sūtta:

> "But for one who sees the origin of the world as it really is with correct wisdom, there is no idea of nonexistence in regard to the world. And for one who sees the cessation of the world as it really is with correct wisdom, there is no idea of existence in regard to the world."

This is where we start to see how the Dharma is the "radical challenge" that I mentioned in the first talk in April. This short section in the Sūtta sometimes takes a while to absorb to get a sense of what it the Buddha is teaching, so bear with me. Once we do absorb it, however, the sense we receive often manifests as a deep responsibility in practice, and a deep calm in our practice, and a clarified purpose of how to practice.

The origin of the world is the production, or arising, of these same formations. This origin, this production of formations, in other Sūttas is described as the 12-fold chain of Dependent Co-arising, where ignorance creates volition (karma), consciousness, etc. So, for this passage, you can alternatively say, "for one who sees

Dependent Co-arising in the forward order, there is no idea of nonexistence in regard to the world." This means that when we see how "things" are actually produced, "when this arises, that arises," we do not and can not say that things do not exist. When the proper conditions are present, things have to, and will, arise.

Simple example is listening to my voice. When I'm silent, nothing enters your consciousness that can be described as "Ven. Kōngmù's ramblings." Other things arise in the mind, many directly related to these ramblings or to their absence, but the awareness of the sound my voice creates and the apprehension of the words used are not there. But, when I speak, your mind is filled with this voice, because of the interaction of my voice and your ear faculty, among a million other factors as well. "When this arises (voice), that arises (apprehension)."

And, the same is true with cessation. Here in the passage, "for one who sees the cessation of the world as it really is with correct wisdom, there is no idea of existence in regard to the world," cessation means the cessation of the formations, and is understood as Dependent Co-arising in reverse order. When the conditions that supported arising are not present, or have ceased themselves, then the thing will also cease: it will cease arising and will start to fall.

Now these notions of rising and falling are concepts we have in our minds, based upon "the idea of existence and the idea of nonexistence." When, as the Sūtta says, we correctly perceive (which means when we have Right View) the origin of the world, "nonexistence" does not occur in us. And, when we correctly perceive the cessation of the world, "existence" does not occur. What, then occurs to a person like this? "When this exists, that exists; with the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this does not exist, that does not exist; with the cessation of this comes the cessation of that." It is just this.

Later on, we will hear from Master Yìnshùn on how we can begin contemplating at this level.

Sūtta:

> "The world, Kaccāna, is for the most part shackled by engagement, clinging, and adherence. But this one [with right view] does not become engaged and cling through that engagement and clinging, mental standpoint, adherence, underlying tendency; he does not take a stand about 'my self'."

This is an interesting statement, that the world is "shackled" by clinging and adherence to our views. We bind ourselves and our understanding of all things through this clinging and deep-seated belief in our perceptions. However, as soon as we begin to see the regularity of the Dhamma, the stability, justice, righteousness, grace even, of the Dhamma in the form of Dependent Co-arising, this is when we begin to let go of our clinging.

Letting go is really a profound act of wisdom; the teaching of emptiness, of prajñā, gives us the permission and authority, so to speak, to let go. So often, we try to let go through a sense that it is good to do so; we may even be able to convince ourselves of the value of letting something go. However, when we see, "with correct wisdom," the production and cessation of our internal world, our letting go is spontaneous, natural, and complete. This is because we see that there is nothing to cling to in the first place.

With this wisdom of letting go that comes from the Right View of the Middle Way beyond the two extremes of existence (is) and nonexistence (is not), we see ourselves in a much clearer, honest, and wise light. In traditional Buddhist teaching, it is said that there are two kinds of emptiness: emptiness of self and emptiness of things. In actual fact, there is just one kind of emptiness, because the self, as much as we cherish are particular brand of it, is in no way different from "things." We, our body, feelings, perceptions, choices, and awareness, are just as conditioned as anything else: they depend completely upon the arising and passing of other things for our being. As Thich Nhat Hahn says, "A human being is made up completely of non-human elements." So, a person with Right

View "does not take a stand about 'my self.' S/he knows clearly that any attempt to do so is like trying to build in quicksand; we are bound to suffer when we take a stand about myself.

Sūtta:

> "He has no perplexity or doubt that what arises is only suffering arising, what ceases is only suffering ceasing. His knowledge about this is independent of others. It is in this way, Kaccāna, that there is right view."

This means that whatever arises, be it internal or external, a person with Right View sees as conditioned, not stable, and not reliable because it does not have an independent existence. And, for one seeking the unconditioned, the stable, and a True Refuge, anything that is conditioned is unsatisfactory, another English rendering for suffering. And, as this Sūtta says, it is only when we combine "correct wisdom," seeing the production and cessation of the world, with a turning away from our reliance upon that which is conditioned, that we can properly say that we have Right View. When this occurs, our "knowledge about this is independent of others." We have confirmed this truth deeply for ourselves through direct, penetrative observation.

Sūtta:

> "'All exists': Kaccāna, this is one extreme. 'All does not exist': this is the second extreme. Without veering toward either of these extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma by the middle: 'When this exists, that exists; with the arising of this comes the arising of that.' Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.
>
> "'But, with the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance comes the cessation of volition: 'when this does not exist, that does not exist; with the cessation of this

comes the cessation of that.' Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering."

Ok, so that is the Kaccānagotta Sūtta, in a brief nutshell. Again, there is so much here that one could spend an entire life upon its implications; it is one of the most eloquent and concise expressions of Right View and the Middle Way.

I'd like to now offer some of what Master Yìnshùn says about how we can being to contemplate Dependent Co-arising so that we can break through the views of existence and nonexistence and penetrate deeply into impermanence and non-self.

There is not much translated yet into English written by this great Master. I've relied heavily upon two primary sources: Master Yìnshùn's commentary to verse number 96 in his book, *The Way to Buddhahood*, and chapter six in Volume 2 of the Miào Yún 妙雲 Collection, entitled "Śūnyatā (Emptiness) from the Mahāyāna Perspective." We have this volume downstairs available for dana; this is also available in a .pdf compilation of his work called "Teachings in Chinese Buddhism," available through www.buddhanet.net online.

Verse 96 (page 171):

Such was taught by the Buddha:
Dependent Origination from the perspective of the Middle Way
Is not attached to the view of either existence or nonexistence.
One can be liberated with such right understanding (Right View).

In this very pithy section, Master Yìnshùn explains with much more profundity and lucidity what I have only glossed over. I highly encourage anyone interested in pursuing this further to read this section, as well as the two preceding ones, which speak more directly about Dependent Co-arising.

He ends his commentary to verse 96, by saying "In summary, everything originates dependently. There is no real self or real thing, so the view of existence does not arise. Without real selves and real things, the view of nonexistence also does not arise. Truly contemplating Dependent Co-arising, free of attachment to the views of existence and nonexistence, one attains liberation. Both the superior study of wisdom – the profound prajñā – and the right understanding of the Noble Eightfold Path are the contemplation of the dependently originated Middle Way. Therefore, Buddhists can be detached from a permanent, eternal self, without falling into the biased views of nonexistence and existence, nihilism and eternalize, identity and difference, thereby breaking through ignorance and becoming liberated from birth and death (Page 174– slightly paraphrased)."

I'd like to end with how Master Yìnshùn suggests we begin to contemplate Dependent Co-arising and the Middle Way. This is from the chapter on Śūnyatā mentioned earlier, from Volume 2 of the Miào Yún 妙雲 Collection. This whole chapter is quite outstanding in its description of Dependent Co-arising and emptiness; very encouraging as well. He makes the very important point that "emptiness" is actually a greatly positive teaching, as emptiness is the principle that allows everything to manifest perfectly, without obstructing any other thing. Highly recommended.

In this chapter is suggests three ways to contemplate Dependent Co-arising. First of all, a word about this word, contemplate. This does not mean, "to think something through," using our discriminating and analytical mind to search for Dependent Co-arising. Rather, contemplate means, "to look at or observe with continued attention." The Chinese character for this is quite helpful also: guān (觀), where the left side of the character is a picture of a heron, and the right side is the character for "seeing, view, etc." Imagine a heron in a pond with continued, fully engaged attention at the water looking for its next meal; completely focused. This is also the character used in "Guān Shì Yīn:" She who regards the

world, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, who contemplates the emptiness of the five skandhas in the Heart Sūtra we will recite momentarily.

The first way Master Yìnshùn suggests is to observe the immediately preceding condition. Keeping this preceding condition in mind, we see directly impermanence, because, where did this preceding condition go? Where did the sentence I just spoke go? Where did the experience of this snap go? In actual fact, it went nowhere, because it came from nowhere it existed just as long as its supporting causes and conditions existed. Observing the preceding state with focused observation helps us to get a glimpse of Dependent Co-arising. This is contemplation from the perspective of time; the observation of the Universal Characteristic of Impermanence.

The second way is to observe the interrelationships of things, which is contemplation from the perspective of space. This form of observation is to see directly the dependency of something upon other things. For instance, strawberry shortcake. I made strawberry shortcake today for lunch. Now what I call strawberry shortcake is actually a combination of many different conditions: strawberries, pound cake, sugar, cream, time, effort, sunlight, soil, generosity, heat, eyes, tongue, etc. And even the "I" that made it is an ineffable combination of conditions as well. So, this time of observation, seeing what gives rise to other things, is the second method of contemplating Dependent Co-arising: the observation of the Universal Characteristic of Non-self.

The third way, what Master Yìnshùn called the contemplation of the True Nature. Now, I will not be able to explain very much of this type of contemplation, as it is very profound and way out of my league. However, what Master Yìnshùn says is that this is seeing that the true refuge of all things, including ourselves, is the great and profound Emptiness that allows everything the freedom to arise. Contemplating the True Nature, also known as Nirvana nature, comes from contemplating the vertical relationship in the first contemplation (of preceding and current conditions) and the horizontal relationships (of inter-relationships.) The Lotus Sūtra, in

a famous stanza from Chapter two, the Buddha says, “Though I proclaim Nirvana, this is not real cessation. All things, from the beginning, are ever of the nirvana-nature.” This says, among other things, that the realization and awakening to Nirvana comes from contemplating at a very profound level, the True Nature of all things; this is another way to say, contemplating Dependent Co-arising and the Middle way: the contemplation of the Universal Characteristic of Nirvana, those showing the Three Dharma Seals in contemplating Dependent Co-arising.

For those of us who would find this interesting, Master Yìnshùn related these three types of contemplation to the Three Doors of Liberation: Contemplating impermanence corresponds to the door of desirelessness; contemplating non-self corresponds to the door of emptiness; and contemplating Nirvana-nature corresponds to the door of formlessness.

To conclude with, Master Yìnshùn assures us that, through this contemplation, “All our contradictions, impediments, and confusion will be converted to equanimity. Free from illusion, complete peace will be the result of attaining Nirvana.”

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Standing Buddha at sunrise with fog
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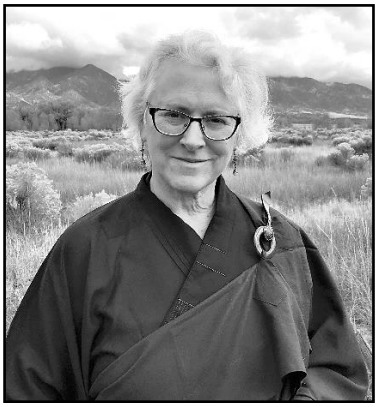
Compassion, Caring, and Respect



Xiǎnyī Sharon Corcoran

Former Senior Lay Teacher

I was born in St. Louis, where the most important question put to people to determine everything about them was, "Where did you go to high school?" Because we lived in the western reaches of St. Louis County, I was able to commute daily to the Academy of the Sacred Heart in St. Charles; many of my friends there were boarders. It is a school with a long history, founded in 1818 by Saint Philippine Duchesne. The religious order originated in France, but Mother Duchesne held the Indians of the New World close to her heart, and founded a school for them in Kansas before coming to St. Charles to educate the daughters of the early settlers west of the Mississippi. The religious of the Sacred Heart are the female order connected with the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits. Their mission is education, and in my experience their approach was education of the mind as well as of the whole person, promoting responsible and caring service in the world. I was raised as a Catholic, although my father was a Protestant, at a time when religious mixed marriages were not as common as today. I have four sisters, and in our adulthood, we have individually gravitated to different religions or

spiritual paths, perhaps a result of our ecumenical family background.

Terry Corcoran is my husband of 25 years–an artist, singer, musician, and a fellow Buddhist practitioner. We went to live in Ireland together with Terry's son and daughter in 1991, until early in 2007. While there I read *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* by Sogyal Rinpoche, following the death of a close family relation. The book touched my heart and turned it toward Buddhism. This heart connection was cemented at a retreat I attended with Sogyal Rinpoche, and another with Ringu Tulku Rinpoche, at Dzogchen Beara (a Tibetan Buddhist retreat center and hospice) in Co. Cork. It was extremely fortunate for me to begin studying Buddhism in earnest at this time (around 2003) because I had already been practicing meditation—on and off, and trying to follow first one tradition, then another (e.g. Transcendental Meditation, Christian, Sufi) for most of my adult life. I seemed to be drawn from quite an early age to contemplative practice. Finding Buddhism gave me a much more solid base of knowledge to support and guide my meditation practice.

As Terry and I were preparing to move back to the U.S. to help care for my aging parents, I knew I wanted to continue studying and practicing in community. Thanks to an internet search for "Buddhism in Missouri" I located MABA as a possible sangha and practice center near to our eventual home in Marthasville. Joining the MABA sangha was a tremendous blessing for which I remain truly grateful. The first person I met at MABA was dharma sister Jaw-Lin Ong, who gave Terry and me a tour of the grounds and buildings, and invited us to lunch with the monastics and other visitors. Before long I was involved in study groups led by Don Shūshu and Katty, reveling in the depth and breadth of the Dharma (although I am still far from having mastered any of it). By the time Master Jìrú emerged from his two-year retreat in 2009, I was ready to take Refuge and Precepts from him, and he also at that time

authorized me to teach meditation and give dharma talks. The following year, 2010, I took the Bodhisattva vows. At Master Jìrú's urging, I organized meditation classes in Augusta and in Washington, MO, as well as at my place of employment, the Psychology Department at Washington University in St. Louis. The Dharma name given to me with the Precepts is Xiǎnyī. I'm told this translates as 'manifesting ease/leisure/excel.' I think the name describes my ability to excel at taking it easy!

In 2016, I retired from my full-time job and moved with Terry to Crestone, Colorado from where I am writing now. We were drawn to Crestone by its natural beauty, climate, and not least for its many spiritual centers representing various traditions: Tibetan and Bön Buddhism, Zen, a Carmelite monastery and chapel, Episcopal and Baptist churches, Haidakhandi Universal Ashram, Shumei International Institute, Sufism, and Crestone End of Life Project, to name a few. The last-named organization, abbreviated CEOLP (pronounced 'kelp'), is one that has particularly inspired me and drawn me into its work of supporting end-of-life wishes outside of the normative practices of our culture. CEOLP and its sister organization, Informed Final Choices, supports a variety of end-of-life choices, whether personal or from a faith tradition, from the right not to be embalmed, the right of family members and friends to handle and care for the body, and opportunities for open-air cremation, and "green" or natural burial. I have joined CEOLP and IFC because of their volunteer-members' commitment to serving individuals at the most transformative and mysterious transition of life, which we call 'death.'

Crestone has offered opportunities for me to engage in solitary retreat, which I feel has deepened my practice. I have continued working with the practice of Pure Awareness and meditation with the body as taught by Reggie Ray of Dharma Ocean, which I began two or three years ago. A very useful adjunct to my meditation practice has been my work with a very skilled Hakomi therapist here

in Crestone. The Hakomi method is mindful, somatic, experiential psychotherapy. Through this work I hope to take greater responsibility for my karma by seeing its origins in early life, and to gain greater freedom from the demands of ego so that I can better relate to and serve all beings with generosity and compassion.

I have found that the community of Crestone and the Baca Grande subdivision which surrounds the town is united by values of compassion, neighborly caring, respect for all spiritual and religious traditions, and care for all aspects of the natural environment: earth, water, air, animals, and vegetation. No community is perfect, but one quickly becomes aware here of the vibrational influence of these sacred mountains and high valley, as well as the presence of so many spiritual centers, so that continuous practice of the Four Immeasurables seems easier than in other places. In this new home which I have come to love, I remain forever grateful for the training and spiritual support which I received from all my teachers and friends at MABA.

In closing, I would like to share a text that I have been practicing with, called "*The Four Dharmas of Gampopa."* It is useful to chant these lines repeatedly, allowing the aspirations to penetrate the mind and heart.

Grant your blessings so that my mind may be one with the dharma.
Grant your blessings so that dharma may progress along the path.
Grant your blessings so that the path may clarify confusion.
Grant your blessings so that confusion may dawn as wisdom.

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The Perfection of Patience

Xiǎnyī Sharon Corcoran

May 2011

The topic of my talk today is The Perfection of Patience, keeping to this year's theme of the Paramitas, those six–or sometimes ten–virtues that are the special practice of Bodhisattvas. And just to remind you, a Bodhisattva is a person who has dedicated his or her life to benefiting other beings, to practice virtue, wisdom, and concentration not for her own liberation, but so that all other beings may first gain liberation from suffering. The paramitas are called perfections because they give rise to complete enlightenment, or freedom from negative emotions and their causes, and to the transformation of ignorance to knowledge and insight into all phenomena. And just to recap for the benefit of newcomers, the six Paramitas of the Mahāyāna tradition are: generosity, morality, patience, diligence, concentration, and wisdom.

Patience is an enormous topic. The Buddha taught that we should avoid doing harm and to always try to do good, to be of benefit to others. This is impossible without practicing patience. Patience is the antidote to hatred and anger–we know this from our own experience, that when we lose our temper, it's because on some level our patience has run out. We are frustrated at not getting our way, at things not going the way we want them to. We moan and groan behind the steering wheel because there is no escape from the traffic, and perhaps we become aggressive toward other drivers. We yell at our spouse or our children for something they have done that "gets on our nerves" or offends our ego. I think we all have lots of experience with the effects of a lack of patience.

And what about patience with ourselves? Sometimes we want to change ourselves, or to master a new skill, but we find that the results don't come fast enough, we come up against our own old habits, or the limits of our comprehension (if it's a mental or intellectual task) or our dexterity or facility (if it's a manual or physical task). And then very often we may give up. We lose

patience with the task but most importantly with ourselves, and thereby lose an opportunity that had previously been important to us.

In meditation, a lack of patience results in giving in to the five hindrances, which are sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt. We sit down to meditate for 30 minutes, but after 15 minutes we feel sleepy, so we let ourselves drift off, or we feel hungry and we decide to get up early from our sitting, or something that happened during the day keeps bothering us, we can't get it out of our mind, and we just turn our mind over to that concern. Or we feel we're not really meditating–nothing great and spiritual seems to be happening–so what good is this, anyway (that's doubt). To overcome these hindrances, these ego-traps or karmic traps that always threaten to block our spiritual progress, requires great patience.

But I'm going to approach this topic from a little bit different direction today. I would like to talk to you about three great examples of 20th century bodhisattvas who perfected patience: Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Cesar Chavez. What do they all have in common? They worked to alleviate injustice being practiced against their people, and did so with perfect commitment to nonviolent means. In his book, The Six Perfections, the author Geshe Sonam Rinchen states, "The practice of nonviolence is impossible without patience." This sentence jumped out at me and I decided to find out more about these great examples of patient nonviolence.

It also seemed appropriate to talk about the example of these people because this month marks the 50th anniversary of the Freedom Riders–how many here have heard of the Freedom Riders? I think PBS just aired a program about them. They were young people, black and white, who in 1961 travelled from the northern states by car or bus to places like Jackson, Mississippi or Selma, Alabama, to assist in the civil rights demonstrations that were going on in those places. They wanted to lend their support, and many were beaten, even killed, for their convictions and their desire to stand alongside their African-American brothers and sisters who

were nonviolently trying to oppose the injustice of racist laws that segregated blacks from whites. I think the Freedom Riders, too, were bodhisattvas practicing patience.

Gandhi led the movement to attain independence for India from British Rule. On April 6, 1930, after having marched 241 miles on foot from his village to the sea, Gandhi arrived at the coastal village of Dandi, India, and gathered salt. It was a simple act, but one which was illegal under British colonial rule in India. Gandhi was openly defying the British Salt Law. Within a month, people all over India were making salt illegally, and more than 100,000 were sent to jail; many fell victim to police violence, but none retaliated or even defended themselves. The Salt March of 1930 was a vital step toward India's independence from Britain. Gandhi, who was known to many as "Mahatma" (Great Soul), had led the masses of India into a program of massive disobedience to British law; what was most important to Gandhi, however, was that Indians use neither violence nor hatred in their fight for freedom.

Elements of Gandhi's philosophy were rooted in the Indian religions of Jainism and Buddhism. Both of these advocate ahimsa (nonviolence), which is "absence of the desire to kill or harm." The Buddha taught nonviolence, pointing out that all beings hold their lives dear, all of us like pleasure and hate pain. Ahimsa is a way of living and thinking which respects this deeply.

Gandhi was both religious (a Hindu) and open-minded, and saw the different religions as paths to the same goal. He was also inspired by the teachings of Jesus, in particular the emphasis on love for everyone, even one's enemies, and the need to strive for justice. He also took from Hinduism the importance of action in one's life, without concern for success; the Hindu text Bhagavad-Gita says, "On action alone be thy interest, / Never on its fruits / Abiding in discipline perform actions, / Abandoning attachment / Being indifferent to success or failure." Non-attachment is also a Buddhist ideal when doing good.

For Gandhi, ahimsa was the expression of the deepest love for all humans, including one's opponents; this nonviolence therefore

included not only a lack of physical harm to them, but also a lack of hatred or ill-will towards them. Gandhi rejected the traditional dichotomy between one's own side and the "enemy;" he believed in the need to convince opponents of their injustice, not to punish them, and in this way one could win their friendship and one's own freedom. If need be, one might need to suffer or die in order that they may be converted to love. He saw, in other words, the interdependence of all beings, and that differences are illusory and only a projection of mind.

Gandhi also firmly believed that if violence was used to achieve any end–even if it was employed in the name of justice–the result would be more violence. The Buddha said the same thing in the Dhammapada: "'He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me of my property.' Whosoever harbors such thoughts will never be able to still their enmity. Never indeed is hatred stilled by hatred; it will only be stilled by non-hatred–this is an eternal law."

Gandhi's main tactic in his fight against the British was what he called Satyagraha, which means "Soul-Force or "The power of truth." Gandhi developed Satyagraha as the practical extension of ahimsa and love; it meant standing firmly behind one's ideals, but without hatred. Satyagraha took the form of civil disobedience and non-cooperation with evil. At one point in 1922 when a mob of so-called "Satyagrahis" lit fire to a police station, killing two dozen police officers trapped inside, Gandhi called off the entire Satyagraha and apologized for his mistaken belief that his followers truly understood nonviolence. Gandhi's dream was only partially realized with the independence gained from British rule in 1947. When violence broke out between Hindus and Muslims, resulting in the separate Muslim state of Pakistan, Gandhi went to the most violent areas, walking from village to village through the heart of that violent madness, preaching ahimsa.

Gandhi was an enormous influence on Martin Luther King, Jr. who, also out of his religious convictions, preached nonviolence to his followers in our own country's civil rights movement of the 1960s. I came across an essay by him on the subject of self-defense

as it relates to nonviolence, which I'd like to share with you because I think it illustrates the depth of King's conviction that violence is always wrong. He states that,

…In a nonviolent demonstration, …one must remember that the cause of the demonstration is some exploitation or form of oppression that has made it necessary for men of courage and good will to demonstrate against evil. For example, a demonstration against the evil of …school segregation is based on the awareness that a child's mind is crippled daily by inadequate educational opportunity. The demonstrator agrees that it is better for him to suffer publicly for a short time to end the crippling evil of school segregation than to have generation after generation of children suffer in ignorance.

King understood that no one wants to suffer and be hurt. But he said that "it is more important to get at the cause of evil than to be safe. It is better to shed a little blood from a blow on the head or a rock thrown by an angry mob than to have children by the thousands grow up reading at a fifth- or sixth-grade reading level." Isn't this a great example of perfect patience? To be able to stand fast against rocks and blows to the head, without retaliation?

King used as an example the occasion of his home being bombed in 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama. Many men wanted to retaliate, and place an armed guard on his home. But King would not let them, insisting that the issue was not his life, but whether black people would achieve fair treatment on the city's buses which were segregated at that time. He said, "Had we become distracted by the question of my safety we would have lost the moral offensive and sunk to the level of our oppressors." King concludes his essay with these inspiring words: "Only a refusal to hate or kill can put an end to the chain of violence in the world and lead us toward a community where men can live together without fear. Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives."

The name of Cesar Chavez may not be as familiar to you, but I was fortunate to have worked in his United Farmworkers movement

in the early 70s, and I believe that he, too, was a modern Bodhisattva. Chavez learned about injustice early in his life. He grew up in Arizona; the small adobe home where he was born was swindled from his family by dishonest Anglos. Cesar learned a lesson about injustice that he would never forget. Later, he would say, "The love for justice that is in us is not only the best part of our being but it is also the most true to our nature."

Chavez and his family became migrant farmworkers in California. Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were subject to similar racism as blacks during the '30s and '40s, and were subject to similar discrimination and segregation. He left school early, but later in life education and learning were his passions. His office was lined with hundreds of books, including biographies of Gandhi and the Kennedys. He believed that "The end of all education should surely be service to others." He read also about St. Francis and nonviolence. He came to the conviction that his people, migrant farmworkers of whatever national origin, could only have dignity and safe working conditions by organizing themselves in a union, and so the United Farmworkers union was born in 1962. Few workers could afford to pay dues, but by 1970 the UFW got grape growers to accept union contracts and had effectively organized most of that industry, at one point in time claiming 50,000 dues-paying members. The reason was Cesar Chavez's tireless leadership and nonviolent tactics that included the Delano grape strike, his fasts that focused national attention on farm workers' problems, and the 340-mile march from Delano to Sacramento in 1966. Other people around the country, like myself, volunteered to picket supermarkets, appealing to customers to avoid buying lettuce, grapes, and Gallo wine, as a way of supporting justice for farmworkers.

Unfortunately, the Teamsters union was also trying to organize the huge farms in California, and was not above using violence against the UFW even though workers had voted to belong to that union and not the Teamsters, who had made secret deals with the growers. Cesar was willing to sacrifice his own life so that the union would continue and that violence was not used. Cesar fasted many

times. In 1968 Cesar went on a water-only, 25-day fast. He repeated the fast in 1972 for 24 days, and again in 1988, this time for 36 days. What motivated him to do this? He said, "Farm workers everywhere are angry and worried that we cannot win without violence. We have proved it before through persistence, hard work, faith and willingness to sacrifice. We can win and keep our own self-respect and build a great union that will secure the spirit of all people if we do it through a rededication and recommitment to the struggle for justice through nonviolence."

Many events led Chavez to undertake the fast, especially the terrible suffering of the farm workers and their children, the crushing of farm worker rights, the dangers of pesticides, and the denial of fair and free elections. Cesar said,

"A fast is first and foremost personal. It is a fast for the purification of my own body, mind, and soul. The fast is also a heartfelt prayer for purification and strengthening for all those who work beside me in the farm worker movement. The fast is also an act of penance for those in positions of moral authority and for all men and women activists who know what is right and just, who know that they could and should do more. The fast is finally a declaration of non-cooperation with supermarkets that promote and sell and profit from California table grapes."

Chavez was also aware of the environmental damage that large-scale agriculture was doing, particularly with pesticide use. He said, "During the past few years I have been studying the plague of pesticides on our land and our food. The evil is far greater than even I had thought it to be, it threatens to choke out the life of our people, and also the life system that supports us all. The solution to this deadly crisis will not be found in the arrogance of the powerful, but in solidarity with the weak and helpless. I pray to God that this fast will be a preparation for a multitude of simple deeds for justice. Carried out by men and women whose hearts are focused on the suffering of the poor and who yearn, with us, for a better world. Together, all things are possible."

What more can I add to Cesar Chavez's inspiring words? This past Friday was Commencement Day at Washington University where I work. I was able to listen to the address by Elie Wiesel, the Nobel-prizewinning author and Holocaust survivor who told the graduating class and their guests that his personal commandment is, "Do not stand idly by" when you see injustice. All of us aspiring bodhisattvas should add this to our precepts, under the condition that our opposition to injustice is always undertaken patiently and nonviolently, with love and compassion for both victims and perpetrators of injustice. And lastly there are the words of Gandhi, who never lost faith in ahimsa–nonviolence: "My faith is as strong as ever…There is no hope for the aching world except through the narrow and straight path of nonviolence. Millions like me may fail to prove the truth in their own lives; that would be their failure, never of the eternal law." In other words, we must remain patient not just in our own lifetimes, but patient for eternity.

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Buddha sculpture in the Blue Lotus House's Sati 101 Classroom
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Kāyagatā-sati Sūtta: Mindfulness Immersed in the Body

Xiǎnyī Sharon Corcoran

March 2016

Good morning Venerables, friends. I am basing my talk this morning on the Kāyagatā-sati Sūtta, which translates as Mindfulness Immersed in the Body. I was interested in this particular sūtta because it relates so well to my own practice lately, and the renewed interest and understanding I have in meditation with the body. Besides looking at the sūtta in depth, or at least parts of it, I also want to make connections with contemporary neuroscience and what it teaches us about the brain, the body, and our emotions; also with Tibetan yoga and somatic practices as taught by Reggie Ray, and also with Mahāyāna ideas of emptiness and compassion.

To begin with the sūtta: it tells of an occasion when the Buddha's disciples returned from their alms collection and gathered at their meeting place. Someone said, "Isn't it amazing, friends! Isn't it astounding! –the extent to which mindfulness immersed in the body, when developed and pursued, is said by the Blessed One who knows, who sees–the worthy one, rightly self-awakened–to be of great fruit and great benefit." And the narrator says that the discussion came to no conclusion.

Then the Buddha entered the hall, and asked what the monks had been talking about. So, one of them repeated the exclamation about how amazing and astounding it is, the extent to which mindfulness immersed in the body, when developed and pursued, is said by the Blessed One to be of great fruit and benefit. The monks were quite enthused, it seems, by this teaching, to have used the words 'amazing' and 'astounding.' It sounds as if they felt this was quite a surprising teaching. Perhaps they felt it was amazing that mindfulness immersed in the body could have as great a benefit as the Buddha claimed for it.

So, then the Buddha launches into an explanation of how mindfulness immersed in the body is developed and pursued to be of great fruit and benefit. He describes how a practitioner might go into a secluded place, "sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect and setting mindfulness to the fore." Notice how the correct posture comes first. Our posture when we meditate reflects and communicates our sense of seriousness, dignity, and dedication–not to others, but to our self. By composing our body in a particular way, the body and mind are agreeing to come together for this sacred and wholesome practice.

The Buddha continues, "Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out." Whether the meditator's breath is long or short, the Buddha says, he discerns that it is long or short. He notices the quality of the breath. Next the Buddha says that the meditator trains himself to breathe in sensitive to the entire body, and breathe out sensitive to the entire body. The practice is getting more involved! How often when we meditate do we really practice breathing in and out sensitive to the entire body? Do we really know what this means?

The Buddha's instruction continues, "Breathe in calming bodily fabrication and breathe out calming bodily fabrication." What is this bodily fabrication, and what does it mean to calm it? When we fabricate something, it means we make it, or make it up. And in this case, the Buddha says the approach to the bodily fabrication is to calm it. It seems to me the Buddha's instruction has to do with learning to discriminate true from false–or the fabricated, the "made up"–from the natural or authentic qualities of the body/mind complex. There is a deep level of observation, of intimacy hinted at here, of getting to know the workings of the body, the sensations, the emotions buried within our muscles and tendons and organs.

The Buddha's next words are "And as he remains thus heedful, ardent, and resolute, any memories and resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers and settles inwardly, grows unified and centered. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body." Here the

Buddha is assuring us that as this mindfulness develops, our concerns with the relative pettiness of "the household life" fade away. Our priorities shift, we discover what is truly important and what is mere fabrication.

The Buddha goes on to describe practices for developing mindfulness immersed in the body whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, and indeed when engaging in all the activities of daily life: eating, drinking, chewing, savoring, urinating, defecating, falling asleep, waking up….

"Furthermore," the Buddha continues, "the monk reflects on this very body from the soles of the feet on up, from the crown of the head on down, surrounded by skin and full of various kinds of unclean things: …things like hairs, nails, teeth, bone marrow, all the organs, intestines, and all the various fluids that the organs and the body creates and emits." I think this kind of meditation on the body as an unclean thing was intended for monastics of the Buddha's time as a way of loosening the monk's attachment to the physical body and the sensual life. I'm not sure it's so helpful to us western lay practitioners. But certainly, we can meditate on the internal organs and areas of the body, the muscle groups, the lower belly, the heart center, the solar plexus, the individual toes, all around the shoulder blades, the pelvis, and so on. There is no need to think of the body as something disgusting; what we really want to do is get in touch with the body and become intimate with its stored memories and emotions so that we can integrate the body's knowledge into our consciousness.

A very useful meditation practice is given next by the Buddha in the sūtta, which consists of the monk "contemplating this very body…in terms of properties: …the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property." In meditation, we can actually feel the earth property in the solidity of our body, also the liquid, flowing nature of the blood and other fluids, the tears bathing the eyes, saliva, etc. We can feel the wind property in our breathing and in our body's subtle outer motion through space as we sit, and the fire property in the heat generated by our metabolism, and the variations in temperature ranging from the heat of our

central core to the relative coolness of the extremities. This is a wonderful practice for becoming more intimately acquainted with the body's properties.

That is all I'm going to quote from the Kāyagatā-sati Sūtta. I want to remind you of a story which I think is from the Jataka tales, not from the Pali canon, in which is told the story of the Buddha seated in meditation, nearing his full enlightenment. Mara, the temptor, appears to the soon-to-be Buddha, and claims for himself the Bodhi seat, challenges the Buddha's claim to enlightenment. He is accompanied by his armies of minions who all defend Mara's claim. Mara asks the Buddha who will defend and give witness for him? The Buddha makes a simple gesture, of touching the earth with his right hand. The earth did give her witness to the Buddha, and defended his right to the seat of enlightenment. This has come to be called the Earth Witness mudra, and it is a beautiful image and symbol of how the Buddha and Dhamma are part and parcel of our earthly reality. He did not turn to heavenly beings as witnesses. Buddhadhamma is not transcendent–we connect with our awakened nature, with the truth of the cosmos, with the earth itself and other beings, through our body. This is a very important, very significant, lesson. As Karen Armstrong wrote in her biography of the Buddha, "The man or woman who seeks enlightenment is in tune with the fundamental structure of the universe."

There is another account of the Buddha's enlightenment in the Majjhima Nikāya, in which the Buddha recounts how, following the purification of his concentrated mind in the jhānas, "I inclined my mind to the knowledge of recollection of past lives." Countless past lives were revealed to him, with their experiences of pleasure and pain, his name, appearance, the length of time he lived, and so forth. "This was the first true knowledge attained by me in the first watch of the night. Ignorance was banished and true knowledge arose, darkness was banished and light arose, as happens in one who is diligent, ardent, and self-controlled. But I allowed no such pleasant feeling as arose in me to gain power over my mind."

The Buddha calls this experience "the first true knowledge attained by me…." What is true knowledge but that which is

experiential, first-hand, not received from someone else. He is talking about bodily knowledge. He also says, “darkness was banished and light arose.” In this passage, it seems to me, the Buddha is describing his experience of past lives which have been enfolded in the darkness of his body, hidden from consciousness, until his meditation immersed in the body was able to bring what was hidden in darkness into the light of consciousness. We may also call this the liberation of karma, or liberation from karma–why? Because when the darkness of past experience, which has been hidden from consciousness because it is too painful to admit or accept, is then integrated with consciousness, it loses its power to drive us blindly through the energy of habit and conditioning, of desire and aversion–that is, our karma.

In each of the Buddha’s accounts of his enlightenment experiences, he concludes by saying “But I allowed no such pleasant feeling as arose in me to gain power over my mind.” He is pointing out that yes, there were pleasant feelings involved in these experiences, but he is able to experience them without giving them the power to distract him, or to stimulate grasping in him.

I would like to visit the teachings of Mahāyāna briefly, which also has much to say that is relevant to our sūtta. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra describes the various tiers of consciousness in the individual, culminating in the tathāgatagarbha (womb of the Buddhas) or “storehouse consciousness” (Skt. Ālayavijñāna), which is the base of the individual’s deepest awareness and his tie to the cosmos. Meditation with the body leads us to realize our connection to the entire cosmos by reconnecting with our somatic wisdom. By bringing to light of consciousness the darkness of our karmic past, we are contacting the storehouse consciousness, or ālayavijñāna. Just as the Buddha had several significant dreams on the threshold of his enlightenment, so may we also expect dreams to arise in us as we delve deeper into this realm of body awareness. The name “storehouse consciousness” means that this level of consciousness is where the seeds of karma are stored. Where are we to seek access to this deep level of consciousness, except through the body? Carl Jung, one of the early Western psychologists, believed there was a

"somatic unconscious," and contemporary neuroscience also tells us that our conscious experience can and does hide much of our painful past which, because it is unconscious, emerges in the form of illness, neurosis, depression, and addiction. Bringing past trauma to consciousness, which we can do through meditation with the body, can help us liberate these difficult emotions and memories by integrating them with our conscious mind.

The wonderful writer about neuroscience, Antonio Damasio, has this to say: "Sometimes we use our minds not to discover facts, but to hide them…. One of the things the screen hides most effectively is the body, our own body, by which I mean the ins of it, its interiors. Like a veil thrown over the skin to secure its modesty, the screen partially removes from the mind the inner states of the body, those that constitute the flow of life as it wanders in the journey of each day." This is how we become detached from our body, so that it becomes almost numb to us in many areas. For example, try right now to really feel your big toe. How real is it to you? Perhaps you can imagine where it is, its outlines, but can you really feel it, from the inside? Feel the toenail, and even under the nail?

In another book, The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness, Damasio writes, "Primordial feelings provide a direct experience of one's own living body, wordless, unadorned, and connected to nothing but sheer existence. These primordial feelings reflect the current state of the body along varied dimensions … along the scale that ranges from pleasure to pain, and they originate at the level of the brain stem rather than the cerebral cortex. All feelings of emotion are complex musical variations on primordial feelings." In this statement Damasio is getting at what I experience as deep bodily meditation, in which various parts of the body awaken from the dark, emerge from hiding, to reveal stored tension, pain, stress, which then we have a chance of relaxing, of letting go of. And when we relax those pains and tensions we sometimes get an inkling of the experience that was enfolded with that bodily tension.

The Vajrayāna teacher Reggie Ray gave a powerful dharma talk which I listened to recently, called "Freeing the Prisoner." He begins with the Bodhisattva vow not to realize one's own liberation until all sentient beings are liberated. And he extends the premise of that vow to meditating with the body, because by following this practice we find that within us there are countless suffering beings, locked in dark dungeons and torture chambers, shrieking to be heard and freed. There is one of these tortured beings for every second of our life which has contracted through the suffering, the dukkha, of our existence. These past and present beings have been locked down in the dark to keep "us" adult, competent, self-satisfied egos, from re-living that existential pain. These are the beings we are called to liberate, to see them, by becoming them, and to give them voice. And when we liberate one of these suffering beings, one of these prisoners, we liberate part of every other being. So, we see that meditating with the body is a very, very compassionate practice. Furthermore, until these prisoners are freed, they are actually in control of us, and the greater part of our awareness is involved in keeping them down, of keeping their pain away from our consciousness.

Here is one more quote from the perspective of modern neuroscience, relevant to this work: It is from the book Healing the Traumatized Self: Consciousness, Neuroscience, Treatment by Paul Frewen, and Ruth Lanius. "'Agency' is the technical term for being in charge of your life–knowing where you stand, knowing that you have a say in what happens to you, knowing that you have some ability to shape your circumstances. Agency starts with being aware of our subtle sensory, body-based feelings. The greater our awareness, the greater our potential to control our lives. Knowing what we feel is the first step to knowing why we feel that way. If we are aware of the constant changes in our inner and outer environment, we can mobilize to manage them. But we can't do this unless our watchtower, the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) learns to observe what is going on inside us. This is why mindfulness practice, which strengthens the MPFC, is a cornerstone of recovery from trauma."

The more fully we are embodied, the more mindful we become of our body, the more open and clear is our awareness. The more familiar we become with our body's energies, by patient very close attention and using various practices, the more we are able to descend to the dark chambers where our prisoners are chained, develop the courage to take them by the hand and lead them to the light.

As we are approaching the Christian holiday of Easter, and during this coming week, Holy Week, the passion of Christ will be commemorated, I was reminded of a passage from Christ's life which tells that after his death he descended into hell and freed the souls who had been suffering there, waiting for his coming. Is this not another version of the same story? – of meditation with the body, and the liberation it brings? By going deeply into the body, we have to face the death of the ego in order to befriend the prisoners, the suffering souls who are waiting for the savior: the embodied, compassionate awareness that our practice develops in us.

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Outside Stairs leading to Chán Meditation Hall
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The Virtues of Few Wishes and Contentment: Embracing Sufficiency

Xiǎnyī Sharon Corcoran

July 18, 2010

In "The Discourse Of The Teaching Bequeathed By The Buddha," which the Buddha delivered to his disciples just before his parinibbāna, or passing away–also referred to as "The Buddha's Last Bequest"–he spoke of two specific virtues which he called ADVANTAGES FOR GREAT MEN GONE FORTH TO HOMELESSNESS. This means they are advised for monastics, men and women who have renounced the householder's life. These virtues he calls "the virtue of few wishes" and "the virtue of contentment." Let me read you what the Buddha said about them, in the discourse itself:

> ***1. The virtue of few wishes.*** "O bhikkhus, you should know that those having many desires, by reason of their desire for selfish profit, experience much dukkha [stress, suffering]. Those with few desires, neither desiring nor seeking anything, do not therefore experience such dukkha. Straight-away lessen your desires! Further, in order to obtain all kinds of merit you should practice the fewness of desires. Those who desire little do not indulge in flattery so as to sway another's mind, nor are they led by their desires. Those who practice the diminishing of desires thus achieve a mind of contentment having no cause for either grief or fear and, finding the things they receive are sufficient, never suffer from want. From this cause indeed, (comes) Nibbana. Such is the meaning of 'having few wishes.'"
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> ***2. The virtue of contentment.*** "O bhikkhus, if you wish to escape from all kinds of dukkha, you must see that you are contented. The virtue of contentment is the basis of abundance, happiness, peace and seclusion. Those who are

> contented are happy even though they have to sleep on the ground. Those who are not contented would not be so though they lived in celestial mansions. Such people feel poor even though they are rich, while those who are contented are rich even in poverty. The former are constantly led by their five desires and are greatly pitied by the contented. Such is the meaning of 'contentment.'"

Although the Buddha was addressing his monastic sangha, I believe we lay people can also benefit by taking this advice to heart. Perhaps you have heard about the voluntary simplicity movement. It promotes the ideals of frugality and sufficiency–that is, recognizing when we have enough, and resisting the urge to spend, buy, shop compulsively or impulsively which, unfortunately, our society still likes to encourage because our economy operates on unsustainable principles and practices. Do you remember when the financial meltdown was in full swing, and the pundits pointed out that many more people were saving money instead of spending it, and other bemused experts on TV or radio would admit that this was probably good for individuals, but bad for the economy. Surely there is something wrong with a society in which individual frugality is seen as being at odds with the larger economy which requires ever more spending and consuming. In fact, our economy, to be "healthy" needs us to spend even to the extent of running up high levels of debt! I believe this state of affairs contradicts the practices that the Buddha taught as well as the wisdom of the environmental movement and the voluntary simplicity movement. It also causes us to exceed what we now know to be a sustainable level of consumption of the earth's resources.

Voluntary simplicity also encourages us to divert our precious and limited life energy from the limited goal of earning money to activities that may bring us greater satisfaction, fulfillment, and opportunities to serve. This can work if we recognize that we don't need to earn as much money as we thought we did, because we are satisfied with less "stuff." So, we can downsize our work life to an

occupation that may be less stressful, less time-consuming, and, yes, lower-paid, because we have learned to save more and spend less. Think of the impact this can have on our practice of "Right Livelihood"! I'm not suggesting that everyone needs to change jobs and earn less, necessarily. The point is to be more mindful of the choices we make around earning and spending money, and to consider the tradeoffs those choices entail.

Returning to the sūtta of the Buddha's Last Bequest–the Buddha told his followers that "those having many desires … experience much dukkha [or suffering]." How does this work in our lives? In several ways:

1) Debt: living beyond our means is like putting ourselves in bondage to banks or credit companies. It robs our peace of mind and demands that we work and work to pay off our debt, diverting our life energy from more useful and satisfying activities.

2) Costs of ownership: the more things we own, the more we worry about keeping them safe. We have to pay for their security, perhaps by putting alarm systems on our home, or renting safe deposit boxes. We have to buy insurance policies. Higher taxes might be involved, as with cars, boats, motorcycles, etc.

3) Upkeep and repairs. We have to pay people to repair our home cinema systems, our cars, our washers and dryers. We pay for extended maintenance agreements.

4) Dukkha comes with our frustration at not being able to "keep up" with trends or fashions. If we succumb to the enticements of magazines or websites that promote the latest in clothing or gadgets, we fret unless and until we can afford to buy them for ourselves. So there is stress involved in wanting things whether or not we succeed in acquiring them.

The Buddha continued his discourse, saying: "Those who desire little do not indulge in flattery so as to sway another's mind, nor are

they led by their desires." Think about this. Have you ever tried to persuade someone of something in order to satisfy one of your desires? Or flattered someone in order to predispose them to do something for you, or give something to you? Or tried to cultivate a relationship with someone because they are good looking, powerful, or might be able to do you a favor? What a contaminating influence on our relations with others! Only when we want nothing from someone else can we treat them with full sincerity, with true loving-kindness and compassion. And consider the third Immeasurable, or "heavenly state," that of sympathetic joy: if we want what someone else has, or resent another for having something we don't have, this "heavenly state" is closed to us. Because sympathetic joy means feeling our own happiness grow with the good fortune of another.

The Buddha said, "Those who practice the diminishing of desires thus achieve a mind of contentment having no cause for either grief or fear and, finding the things they receive are sufficient, never suffer from want." The Irish have a saying, "Contentment is wealth." That is exactly what the Buddha is saying in this discourse. By diminishing our desires, we increase our feelings of sufficiency. We no longer feel grief at losing or being unable to accumulate wealth or belongings (which are, after all, impermanent, and lacking in intrinsic selfhood), and we no longer have cause to fear the many possibilities of losing what we have managed to acquire. We enjoy peace of mind, contentment.

To be able to recognize when we have enough is a very powerful, liberating perception. It is like waking up from a trance, because we usually reach that recognition by becoming more mindful. We question what we own, and perhaps decide to hold a garage sale and get rid of a lot of clutter. Or sell something more valuable, perhaps a piece of jewelry or an antique we have inherited. With the proceeds, we can increase our savings, enabling us to work less (perhaps), do more volunteer work, or support a charity we believe in.

I have been reading a few different books on this subject (besides the sutras), one of which is *The New Good Life* by John

Robbins, who is the son of the co-founder of Baskin-Robbins ice cream company. His story is fascinating and an unusual account of the dukkha arising from money attachment. As a young man, he rejected the role his father wanted for him, working within the company and continuing to invent new ice cream flavors. Instead, he moved to a small island off the Canadian coast, taught yoga, lived very simply, growing most of his own food, and spending only $500 a year. He and his wife had a son and eventually moved to California, where he wrote a book, *Diet for a New America* which became a best seller and earned a lot of money for John Robbins. Tours and speaking engagements grew out of the book and also expanded his bank account, and he started a charitable foundation, using his money to support causes that were important to his vision of a better world. Then after more years, his son married and he and his wife had twins with severe special needs. Robbins was happy to be able to provide the money the twins would obviously need for the rest of their lives. To maximize his savings and earnings, he handed over his savings, including a second mortgage on his home, through a friend, to Bernard Madoff[i]. He lost everything. He relates his reaction to this event as being so devastating, that he really wasn't sure that he would survive! And this is from a man who knew how to live on very little, had walked away from an enormous fortune that he stood to inherit, who seemed to be very unattached to wealth and money, uninterested in a luxurious lifestyle. And yet he, too, experienced enormous distress when his money was lost. He must have been more attached than he realized! I'll satisfy your curiosity by saying that he and his wife, son, and daughter-in-law all pulled together, got jobs, and help from many friends–Robbins himself wrote another book–and together managed to get themselves back on track toward solvency.

We need to remember that the Buddha taught the middle way, meaning that we gain nothing struggling under self-imposed

[i] The admitted operator of a Ponzi scheme that is considered the largest financial fraud in U.S. history.

poverty and asceticism. Our challenge is to see when we have enough. Of course, if we are addicted to anything, including shopping, then we never experience "enough." This is why the Buddha said we need to cultivate those two virtues, the virtue of few wishes and the virtue of contentment. Then our "enough" meter will register at lower and lower levels without our feeling deprived or impoverished.

I think it is useful to consider what we have to gain by saying No to more–more than is sufficient:

1) Health. We know that moderation in food, drink, and exercise leads to greater health. If you are a meat-eater, consider eating less meat, perhaps going meatless at least one day a week. This is good for you, good for the environment, good for the cows, pigs, chickens, and fish. If you belong to a gym for exercise, perhaps you can save that money and get your exercise more simply, by walking or cycling outdoors, enjoying more contact with the natural world.

2) Free time. Are you someone who is always "going out" to shows, movies, parties? By cutting back on these activities, you can get more time to study, practice, enjoy seclusion, perhaps in nature, more time with yourself or with your family.

3) No fear. By cutting back on purchases we reduce the fear and apprehension we suffer at the thought of having our possessions lost or stolen.

4) Good credit rating (good reputation!). By avoiding debt and living beyond your means, you avoid making enemies, either of friends who loan you money, or credit card companies if you default. Of course, credit card companies love for you to be in debt; but they don't like it at all if you stop paying your minimum monthly payment!

5) Right Livelihood. Perhaps more opportunities for satisfying work, or work that is more socially beneficial, will

be open to you if you can make do with a lower salary. At the other extreme, what makes someone become a drug dealer? Extreme greed, right?

6) Space. With fewer possessions we have less clutter, we need fewer closets and storerooms, basements, attics, two-car garages, bookcases, storage solutions. We can live in a smaller space, more easily find space for meditation. Have fewer walls to paint, floors to mop.

7) Security in the form of increased savings, and/or lack of debt.

8) "Disposable" income. We can re-name this "saved life energy" available to us to do greater good.

9) More to share; more opportunities to demonstrate a more open hand and open heart.

The book *Voluntary Simplicity* by Duane Elgin, which was first published in 1981, credits eastern philosophies, including Buddhism, for encouraging a life of "material moderation and spiritual abundance." He cites Lao-Tsu from the Taoist tradition as saying, "He who knows he has enough is rich." And Mahatma Gandhi, who said, "Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants. This alone promotes real happiness and contentment." Elgin also quotes E.F. Schumacher, author of *Small is Beautiful,* one of the early manifestos of the environmental movement, as describing a Buddhist economy. This is one that "provides an adequate range of material goods and whose production processes are in harmony with both the environment and available resources." Elgin goes on to say that "The middle way of Buddhist economics moves between mindless materialism, on the one hand, and needless poverty, on the other. The result is a balanced approach to living that harmonizes both inner and outer development."

If you, like I, have ever felt frustrated at feeling you don't have enough time, feeling torn in many directions, feeling that you'd like

to do more for other people than just donating money to charities– then it may be a good idea for you, too, to reevaluate your financial life and try to bring it more into line with the Buddhist economics described by Schumacher and by the Buddha himself. By cultivating the virtue of Few Wishes and the virtue of Contentment we may, in the words of John Robbins, "live with infinite gratitude to all things past, infinite service to all things present, and infinite responsibility to all things future."

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Okra, chestnuts, string beans, cucumbers, and tomatoes are among the many vegetables, fruits, and nuts grown in the gardens at MABA.


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BLUE LOTUS HOUSE

The Blue Lotus House, which opened in 2017, has always been the location of the female residential hall at MABA. The newly expanded house encompasses the original century-old farmhouse, and is three times larger. The female monastics reside here on a daily basis, and female practitioners also stay here during retreats.

The new Blue Lotus House is now 12,000 square feet, on four levels, and is of timber frame construction with geothermal heating and cooling. On the ground floor is a kitchen capable of serving 40–50 people during retreats, pantries, dining area, laundry, library, office, classroom (Sati 101), and Mañjuśrī Hall. The second floor is for overnight female guests. The third floor is for the female monastics and other female residents who come to stay at MABA. The Prajñā Hall meditation space is located on the fourth floor.

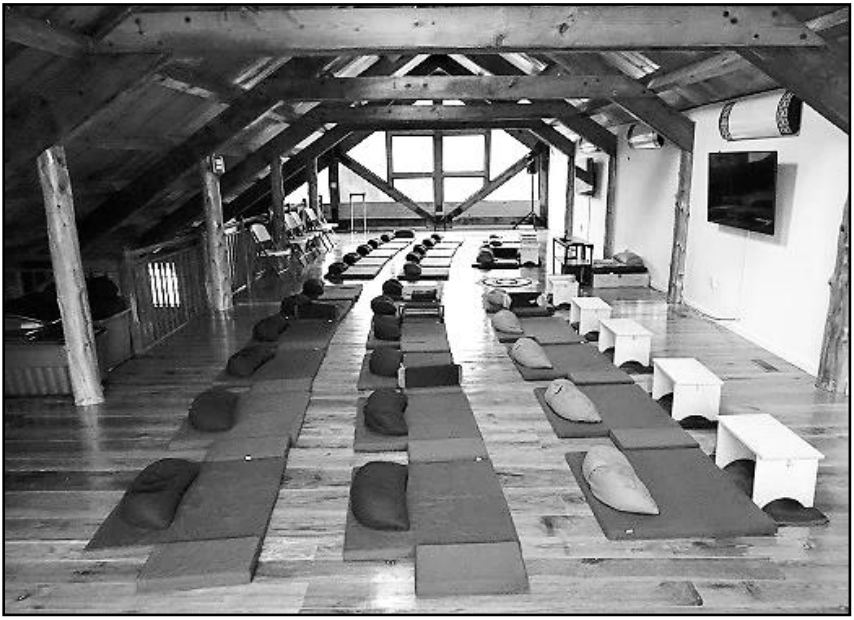
The back of the Blue Lotus House, while under construction in 2016, showing Prajñā Hall windows on the fourth floor, and residential space on the third and second floors. The library and kitchen areas are on the first floor, center and far right, respectively.

Overlooking the dining area from the second-floor walkway, the main entrances into the Blue Lotus House can be seen on the left. Mañjuśrī Hall is at the far end of the dining area on the left, while the kitchen and library are at the far end of the dining area on the right.

MAÑJUŚRĪ HALL

Mañjuśrī Hall is a unique circular space with a saucer-shaped roof on the first floor of the Blue Lotus House. It features an open area with exposed beams, lots of natural light, radiant heat floors, and a view of the new koi pond and gardens. It is used for talks, meditation, and study group discussions, both on Sundays and during retreats.

Mañjuśrī sculpture



PRAJÑĀ HALL

On the fourth floor of the Blue Lotus House is Prajñā (Wisdom) Hall, a loft overlooking the main floor with windows at each end, skylights, an exposed beam ceiling, and wood floors. It is used primarily for early morning and evening meditation services for the residents, and for more experienced practitioners during longer retreats.

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In Memory of Venerable Kōnghuàn

空幻師父

In Memory of Ven. Kōnghuàn

I got to know Ven. Kōnghuàn for the first time when I went to MABA for The Meditation for Beginner; it was a Saturday after the Meditation Hall had just been built. We met during recess. She was kind and gentle, with a sweet smiling face. She showed me how to stretch my legs, so that they would be flexible enough to sit on the cushion for meditation. Now I do that stretching all the time.

Time went on, and she encouraged me to read the book "*Mindfulness in Plain English*" by Bhante Gunaratana. Every now and then, we would chat about her life, my life, stories about Buddhism. She always encouraged me to read more about Buddhism, but I always told her I did not have time for myself: I was busy taking care of the family, and learning and doing in the business field. Besides, I was always exhausted, and sick all the time.

When I knew about her having lung cancer, my heart sank. My mother and my sister both died of lung cancer. When I saw her improvement in health after the new cancer treatment, I was happy for her; I thought she had recovered. I admired her courage in facing the sickness and death. And my admiration for her continues.

~ Xiǎndēng Christina Mak

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Warm Memories of a Dear Person

Venerable Kōnghuàn always impressed me with her kind, open, smiling face. Although her English was not as fluent as her sister Venerable Kōngshí's, this never prevented her from expressing her kindness, compassion, and good will. During a week-long retreat at MABA in 2011, I developed a bad cold and Venerable Kōnghuàn nursed me by making hot lemon drinks for me several times a day and showing her concern. I also remember her talking to me about the importance of walking meditation and circumambulation of the standing Buddha sculpture, as a way of staying healthy. She was a dear person whose memory still warms my heart.

~ Xiǎnyī Sharon Corcoran

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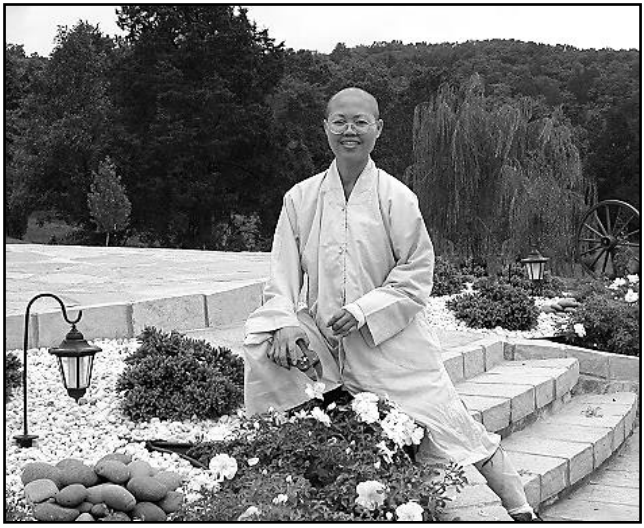

Venerable Kōnghuàn, gardening at MABA.
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Kind, Caring, an Inspiration

Ven Kōnghuàn was kind, loving, patience and compassionate to me. I remembered how she shared her love for meditation and her encouragements to me. I experienced her warmth and caring; her selflessness in service to others. I think of her as my inspiration to practice, and I look to her as my guide in how to conduct myself.

~ Huilin Jaw-lin Ong
慧琳

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Venerable Kōnghuàn

I feel very fortunate to have known Venerable Kōnghuàn. She was quiet, kind, and always seemed to have a smile on her face. She was available for you at any time, and her calm presence was comforting. I was able to get to know her even better when a group of us went to San Francisco, CA on a tour of various temples. We spent several mornings eating breakfast together, speaking about our childhoods, and learning about our different cultures.

When Venerable Kōnghuàn was diagnosed with cancer, I took her to several of her physician appointments. I will never forget her quiet strength when dealing with this disease. I was, and continue to be, in awe of her bravery and acceptance of her path.

I think about Venerable Kōnghuàn often, and the impression she has left on me. She was an inspiration to me, and I continue to try to walk with acceptance and bravery in my own path of life the way she so eloquently did.

~ Xiǎnwǎn Tracy Turner-Bumberry

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Venerable Kōnghuàn

~ Kōng: Emptiness
~ Huàn: Illusion
~ Emptiness of Illusion, clearly describes our dear Venerable Kōnghuàn

~ She was a very "down-to-earth" and factual person
~ Very calm and peaceful
~ Very compassionate and warm

~ I still miss her smiling face…and her delicious cooking
~ I miss her encouragement and support
~ Venerable Kōnghuàn, you are always in our heart!!!

~ Xiǎnzhì Katty Choi

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Sweet Memories of Venerable Kōnghuàn

I first encountered Venerable Kōnghuàn in 2005 when my Qigong teacher Ron Rain took me there with my family for a visit. Venerable Kōnghuàn welcomed us with the biggest smile and the warmest joy in her heart. She was wearing her monastic gray long robes; her shaved head was shiny and her eyes twinkling with light. Her demeanor was gentle, her footsteps were light, and her words filled with honey.

As I went back regularly I got to know her more. Venerable K. had deep respect and consideration for all life, the fish in the pond, the birds in the ski, the flower garden which she loved to water and weed at sunrise or sunset. She talked kindly and had a good word for everyone, showing them loving kindness and compassion and accepting them as they are in her serene but steadfast presence.

I particularly remember one Sunday afternoon when after lunch I walked to the Guānyīn Pavilion by the little pond and saw Venerable Kōnghuàn sitting on the bench. She was already sick at this time, but she never lost her kind gentle spirit and had a sense of acceptance and love for what she was experiencing. Master Jìrú pulled out the little canoe and gave Venerable Kōnghuàn a peaceful stroll through the lotuses on the lake. She looked as part of the pond, one with the lotuses and the fish in the pond. This picture frame of her comes to me every time I talk of her. I feel her kind and gentle spirit still at MABA, walking the grounds, watering the plants, or sitting on the bench by the lake. Her teaching was simple: be present, be connected with life, and part of life. Read the Dhamma to find guidance and faith, and to overcome Mara, the Tempter.

~ Xiǎnníng Toni Staicu

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Embodying the Paramitas

Our dear Dharma sister, teacher, friend, and guide Venerable Kōnghuàn embodied so many special qualities of both practice and of being a decidedly good human being. She was the kind of person that brought calmness into any relationship, modeled diligent and selfless practice, and made friends easily and authentically. She was quick to laugh, eager to smile, and always the first to help. She cared for all living things, and brought mindful attention to everything from leading ceremonies to preparing food, from feeding the animals to listening in conversation. Her joyful practice was evident in all she did.

I first met Ven. Kōnghuàn at Shasta Abbey, the Zen monastery in California I originally trained at, sometime around 2003 or 2004. She and Ven. Kōngzhèng both came for an extended stay with the community of a few months, though it was before I was living there fulltime. Even now, close to 15 years after her time at Shasta, the monastics there still remember her kind presence and joyful laughter. Ven. Kōnghuàn was a fresh and gentle spring breeze that permeated the people she encountered.

I was so grateful, and continue to feel very fortunate, to have trained for a time as a monastic with both Venerable Kōnghuàn and Venerable Kōngshí under Master Jìrú. They are not only Dharma sisters, but biological sisters as well, which I was always inspired by. Their harmonious practice, service, and friendship helped me understand much about the Chinese Buddhist culture and tradition, as well as what quiet and diligence practice looks like. They provided stability and balance to the small community of MABA, sharing in the daily responsibilities and making sure the monastery ran in harmony.

Their Dharma names, too, are important and profound teachings showing aspects of the Middle Way and Right View: Ven. Kōnghuàn (空幻) means something like "empty illusion;" Ven. Kōngshí (空實) means something like "empty reality." Harmonizing both of these insights (the empty nature of existence and the empty nature of non-existence) is the beginning of the true wisdom of emptiness.

Venerables Kōngshí and Kōnghuàn

Venerable Kōnghuàn was a joy to know with her beautiful expression of practice that I wished to emulate. Her impact upon those fortunate to call her a friend continues to be marked by a fresh gentleness that accompanies our joyful memories.

Thank you, dear Dharma sister.

Gentleness, fidelity, kindness:
    She demonstrates these
    Qualities of a Buddha.
Generosity, morality, patience,
    Diligence, meditation,
    And wisdom:
Patient paramita practice,
    Step by step,
    Just as the ancients.
The empty nature of illusion,
    She smiles with the fullness
    Of loving kindness.

~ Kōngmù Michael Running

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In Memoriam

It was a brisk, clear autumn morning at the monastery. Touring the grounds, from the Chán Hall to the Guānyīn Pavilion and back, fills a person with some sense of wonderment. How could all this come together in the middle of the Midwest?

The walk continued all the way to the farmhouse, where a hanging screen marked the entrance into an enclosed porch. Here monastics and laypersons alike could remove their shoes before pushing open the old wooden door. Inside, sitting on the couch, was a dear venerable, peaceful, and calm.

As two old friends, they sat together with few words needing to be exchanged. Although it was a bit unusual, the Venerable reached out to hold the hand of her visitor. He noted that her hand seemed small, but warm. He began:

"I walked around the monastery this morning. Each place I looked, at the buildings, I saw you there. Each place I looked, at the gardens, I saw you there. Each place I looked, at the open space and sky, I saw you there."

Venerable Kōnghuàn just smiled. After a moment, she said most simply:

"I see you there too."

And those were their last words before parting.

~ Xiǎnkuān Don Shūshu

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THE PǓXIÁN TEA HOUSE`

The next project at MABA is to convert the historic shed into a multiuse Tea House. A date for breaking ground has not yet been set, but plans are in place and we have started our fundraising.

The Pǔxián Tea House will be home for the Samantabhadra (Pǔxián) sculpture *(shown, left)*, currently housed in the Blue Lotus House.

Samantabhadra is the Bodhisattva of the Ten Great Vows.

Imagine! 想象!

This historic shed transformed!

The Tea House 茶屋 MABA's next project

MABA's new Tea House will serve as a meeting place for conversation and study, and home for our Samantabhadra 普賢菩薩 sculpture.

Donations are welcome.

See donation box in the Blue Lotus House, or donate online: www.maba-usa.org

Our goal: $150,000

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Dedication of Merit

Learning the Dharma,

practicing the way of awareness,

Give rise to benefits without limit.

We vow to share the fruits with all beings.

We vow to offer tribute to parents, teachers, friends,

and numerous beings who give guidance

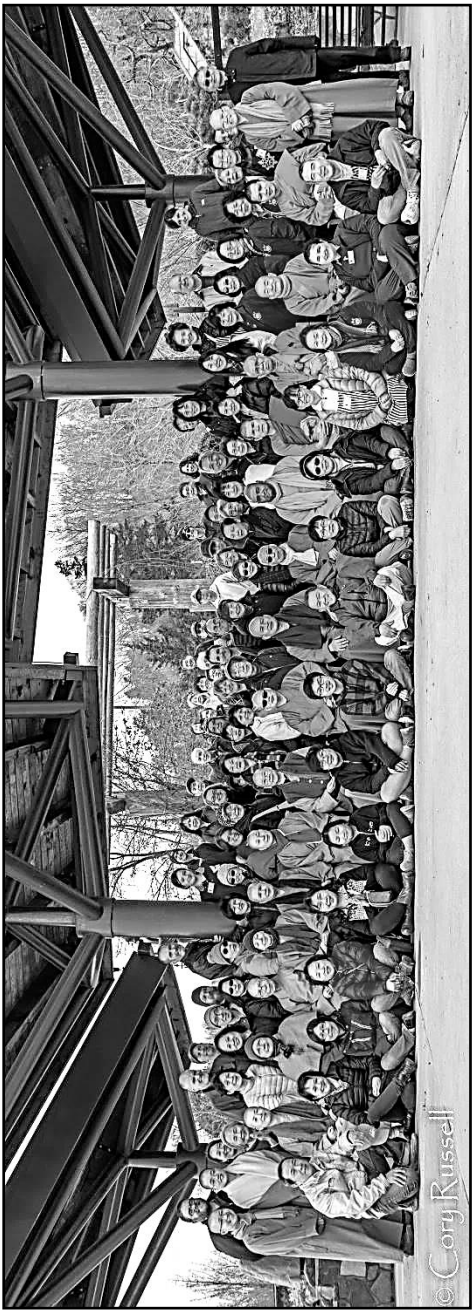
and support along the path.

May we end all afflictions,

So that understanding can arise,

The obstacles of unwholesome acts be dissolved,

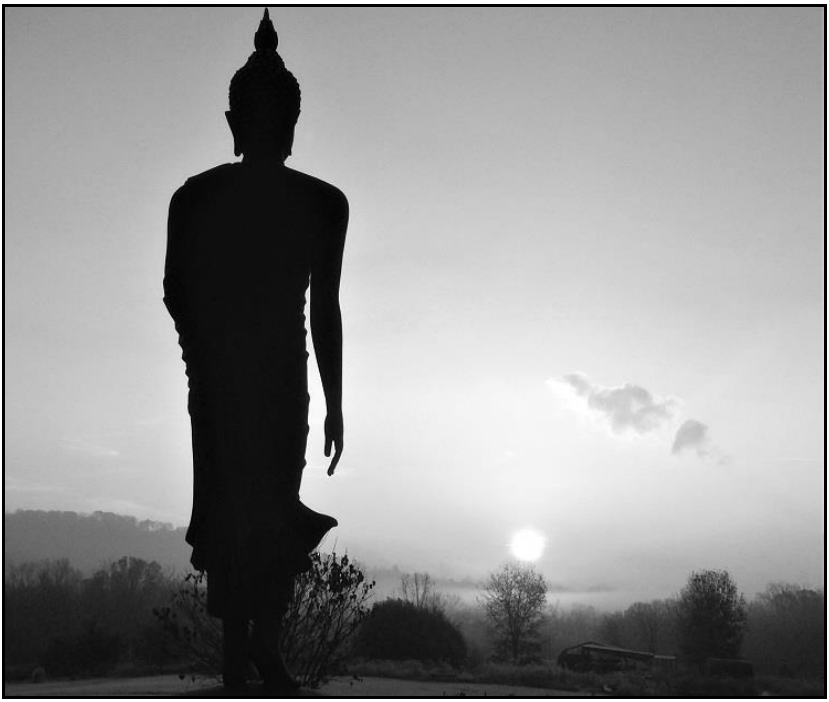
And the fruit of awakening be fully realized.



With humble gratitude to our community near and far.

We are one.

MABA's 23rd Anniversary Celebration (2018)



May All Beings Be Happy and Peaceful!