

RIGHTVIEW QUARTERLY

DHARMA IN PRACTICE

FALL 2008



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On the cover:

The 30 Ajanta caves, ornate Buddhist temples cut into a remote basaltic ridge northeast of Mumbai in India, are filled with sacred imagery honoring the Buddha. Most of the caves were excavated in the mid-fifth century, commissioned by powerful Buddhist aristocrats who employed hundreds of craftsmen to remove rock, sculpt images of deities, and paint lavish wall paintings illustrating the previous lives of Buddha as well as events from the life of the historical Buddha. The image on our cover was photographed by Benoy Behl and can be found in his book, *The Ajanta Caves, Ancient Paintings of Buddhist India*.

Editor **XIANYANG CARL JEROME** introduces the central teachings of the Buddha as a giant skillful means practice.



Xianyang Carl Jerome
is the editor of
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Quarterly
magazine and
editor of
RightviewOnline.org

The heart and core of Buddhist practice may be found in the four noble truths. The Indian prince Siddhartha Gotama essentially discovered this view of the human condition during a night of intense meditation. He revealed his insight soon thereafter and spent the rest of his long life teaching and demonstrating the way to end dukkha (suffering). For the past 2500 years, the teachings and practices of the Buddha have spread throughout the world.

Meditation is the central practice of those teachings. Meditation is supported by a series of guidelines for making ethical decisions, most importantly, the precepts and the paramitas; and by the development of wisdom, the understanding of how things really are rather than how we perceive them to be with our dukkha-oriented minds. When we practice with these teachings and see that they work in our lives, our efforts are reinforced, and the role of karma and its companion teaching, dependent origination, become more evident.

A belief in karma, the immutable law of cause and effect, underlies Buddhist practice. Karma, which might be called the essence of the second noble truth, is integrally related to several other core teachings, in particular the concept of dependent origination, the twelve-point description of the conditional relationship of phenomena in samsara, aka the human condition. Karma answers the questions that make Buddhism a spiritual practice: Where do we come from? Why are we here? What should we be doing while we are here? Where do we go next?

Faith, which can be defined as the conviction to follow the teachings of the Buddha because one has seen through personal experience that they work, is the cornerstone of practice. Without faith, without believing that these teachings and practices are effective, it is not possible to stay on the path for very long because following this path requires commitment, determination, and diligence, all of which can falter without faith.

In summary, the Buddhist path is a triad of supporting practices, with meditation at the center, and with moral discipline and wisdom flanking and supporting it. Karma makes this practice possible and faith allows us to continue on the path.

Other key concepts include the three dharma seals (impermanence, no-self, and nirvana), the three marks of existence (suffering, impermanence, and no-self), and the four heavenly abodes, sometimes called the four immeasurables.

These key teachings may be reviewed in more detail in beginning on page 11. They are necessarily brief and incomplete, but are an attempt to crystallize some of the ideas that are unique to this non-theistic, and some would say, scientific religious system.

It should be remembered that all of these teachings are a meta-praxis, a skillful means to get us to the other shore, where we then are encouraged to abandon the ship (the words and views) that got us there.

Articles and stories in *Rightview Quarterly* are centered around the core teachings of the Buddha-dharma and are supplemented by supporting commentaries, essays, and poetry. They are selected from the teachings of all three major traditions: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, and are presented without judgment. They are not meant for comparison, either with each other or with your own practice. They are meant simply to shed light on the path.

NOTE: In our last issue, authorship of the personal essay "*Where Do We Go When We Die?*" was wrongly attributed to Sara Jenkins. It was, in fact, written by Judith Toy. Carl Jerome personally apologizes to both writers for the error.

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TAKE CARE OF THE THREADS

Reverend
Zuiko Redding
finds that our practice
is in the details.



Dogen Zenji,
the founder of Soto Zen,
speaks of
“menmitsu no kafu,”
taking care of everything
we touch in our lives
with a gentle and
considerate
approach,
as if it were
Buddha we were
interacting with.

A friend in Japan once told me, "When life feels totally hopeless, just empty your wastebasket." I started doing that and it worked. I've branched out now. When I feel totally overcome by life in general, I select one small thing and do it—wash the dishes, file the papers on my desk, empty the wastebasket. It always works. Of course, all my problems are not solved, but I have a better feeling about them. At least the wastebasket isn't cluttered anymore. I have more space and I'm more optimistic and motivated.

It's useful to start small in dealing with our lives. Just select one detail and work on that. With one detail I feel that "Yes, I can do that. That's pretty easy." It's one small step in dealing with the fearsome monster. I become encouraged that I have more power than I'd thought.

Our teachers at Shogoji often said that our Soto Zen practice was *menmitsu*—closely woven like cotton fabric. They told us to take care of the threads—the details—and life would take care of itself. In fine cotton cloth the threads are almost invisible. Each thread is weak and insignificant by itself. When they are woven together, all those small, weak threads make a large, strong piece of cloth. This is how we weave our lives - tiny thread by tiny thread. Each seems too small to bother with, but together they make a life.

Looking at the total situation—the huge piece of cloth to be made—can overwhelm us. We may allow our feelings of impatience and powerlessness to stop us in our tracks. Looking at what we have to do to get to some future place, it seems impossible. We don't want to do it. If, instead of living in the future or the past, we just weave the next thread, our ideas and emotions lose their power over us.

I sometimes feel this way when I see what has happened to our planet in just the space of my memory and when I read accounts of the devastation caused by our greed, aversion and delusion.

I find myself grieving that I may spend the last days before my death in a world where people can no longer look forward to a better life, but to one in which the crabs that were cheap and plentiful in my Gulf Coast childhood may be extinct in a short while. I feel myself turning away because it seems I can do nothing to stop this.

Yes, on the grand scale, that may be true. On the scale of menmitsu it is not. I can refuse to buy food made with scarce species of plants and animals. I can repair broken things rather than buy new ones. I can recycle paper, plastic and such. I can write letters and sign petitions. Though it's very small, those small things accumulate.

There is also the power of example. Visitors to Zen Center see our recycling and are encouraged to petition their own community leaders to begin providing curbside recycling.

It's a matter of just putting the next thread in place. No matter how small, each one is equally important. All are connected, woven together, to make something strong, resilient, flexible. Each thread affects the strength of the whole cloth. We can do this when we can turn away from our concern with past and future and our concern with self and focus on just this moment with patience and wholeheartedness.

With all those small acts we build a deep habit of dealing with the world with awareness and generosity. We also build our attitude and effort - we turn toward being effective in this moment and away from depression, powerlessness and grief. Acknowledging and putting aside our judgments and fears, we just do the next thing we can do. There's no worrying about being rewarded—there's just doing what we do because this is what's best in this moment. Not letting the water run unnecessarily when washing dishes might help the world or it might not. It doesn't matter—not wasting water is our habit. This turning of the tap is what we do.

When we don't expect anything, we can keep going. If we expect things and don't get them, our effort weakens. If we don't expect, our effort will always be strong. Returning to the wholehearted pursuit of what this moment is asking of us, we can feel peace and steadiness. The whole universe comes forward to assist us with our efforts.

Knowing this, we can put aside our thoughts and expectations and let this moment be just this moment—deal with this one thread. Let's weave each strand that comes before us into the warp and woof of our lives, with the peace and steadiness that comes with just paying attention.

If we don't expect, our effort will always be strong.

Zuiko Redding is the resident teacher of Cedar Rapids Zen Center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. In 1992 she was ordained in Japan by Rev. Tsugen Narasaki, practicing under his direction at Zuioji Monastery and its mountain training center, Shogoji, where she received teaching transmission in 1996. She is a member of the American Zen Teachers' Association.

COMPASSION ALONE IS NEVER ENOUGH



Thanissaro Bhikkhu offers bedside instructions from the Buddha for how to act with those who are ill and dying.



If you have any friends or family members who are sick or dying, I know of no one who would tell you to treat them in a hardhearted way. Everyone would agree that you should be as compassionate as you can. The problem is that there's little agreement on how compassion translates into specific actions. For some people, compassion means extending life as long as possible; for others it means terminating life—through assisted suicide or euthanasia—when quality of life falls below a certain level. And neither of these two groups sees the other as compassionate at all. The first sees the second as criminal; the second sees the first as heartless and cruel.

For those of us trying to negotiate the murky territory between these two extremes, there's not much reliable guidance. Ours is a culture that doesn't like to think about illness and death, and as a result, when faced with someone who's sick or dying, we're at a loss as to what to do. Some people will advise you simply to do what feels right, but feelings have a way of turning slippery and devious. Some things feel right simply because they make you feel good, regardless of whether they're genuinely right for the other person. A desire to extend life may mask a deeper fear of your own death; a desire to terminate a miserable illness may rationalize your distress at having to witness suffering. Even if you're told to act from a place of mindful presence, you may find that what seem to be your spontaneous

inspirations are actually conditioned by hidden, unexamined assumptions about what life and death are all about.

This is why the simple injunction to be compassionate or mindful in the presence of a sick or dying person isn't enough. We need help in educating our compassion: specific advice on how to think through the implications of our actions in the face of life and death, and specific examples of how people who have contemplated these issues thoroughly have actually acted in the past.

With this thought in mind, I searched through the Pali canon—the oldest extant record of the Buddha's teachings—to see what lessons could be drawn from the Buddha's example. After all, the Buddha often referred to himself as a doctor, and to his dharma as medicine for the sufferings of the world. From his point of view, we're all sick and dying on a subtle level, so we all deserve continual compassion. But what sort of advice did this doctor give when facing the flesh and blood suffering of illness and death? How did he treat people who were physically sick or dying?

You probably know the story of how, together with Venerable Ananda, he once found an unattended sick monk lying in his own filth. After washing the monk, he assembled the other monks, chided them for abandoning their

brother, and gave them strong incentive to follow his example: "Whoever would tend to me," he said, "should tend to the sick." He arranged that monks nursing their fellow monks should receive special allotments of food, to encourage them in their work and help lighten their burden. But he didn't subscribe to the notion that medical treatment should try to extend life at all costs. The vinaya, his monastic discipline, imposes only a minor penalty on a monk who refuses to care for a fellow monk who is sick or dying, or who totally abandons a sick monk before the latter recovers or dies. And there's no penalty for withholding or discontinuing a specific medical treatment. So the rules convey no message that the failure to keep life going is an offense of any kind. At the same time, though, a monk who deliberately ends the life of a patient, even from compassionate motives, is expelled from the monkhood and can never reordain in this life, so there's no room for euthanasia or assisted suicide.

This means that the middle ground is where true compassion can be exercised. The Buddha sets out some guidelines for this area in his definition of the ideal nurse. You're qualified to tend to the sick if (1) you know how to prepare medicines; (2) you know what's amenable to the patient's cure, taking away whatever's unamenable and providing things that are amenable; (3) you're motivated by compassion and not by material gain; (4) you're not squeamish about cleaning up urine, excrement, saliva, or vomit; and (5) you're competent at encouraging the patient at the proper times with talk on dharma.

Of these five qualifications, the one most discussed in the Pali canon is the fifth. So what qualifies as a helpful and compassionate talk on dharma to a person who is sick or dying, and what doesn't?

Here again, the don'ts mark off the territory for the do's. The vinaya cites cases where monks tell a sick person to focus his thoughts on dying, in the belief that death would be better than the miserable state of his life. The sick person does as they advise, he dies as a result, and the Buddha

expels the monks from the monkhood. Thus, from the Buddha's perspective, encouraging a sick person to relax her grip on life or to give up the will to live would not count as an act of compassion. Instead of trying to ease the patient's transition to death, the Buddha focused on easing his or her insight into suffering and its end.

This is because he regarded every moment of life as an opportunity to practice and benefit from the dharma. *It's a well-known principle in all meditation traditions that a moment's insight into the pain of the present is far more beneficial than viewing the present moment with disgust and placing one's hopes on a better future.* This principle applies as much at the end of life as it does anywhere in the middle. In fact, the Buddha encouraged his monks to reflect constantly on the potential imminence of death at every moment, even when in ordinary health, so that they could bring a sense of urgency to their practice and give the present moment their full attention. If you learn to treat all moments as potentially your last, then when your last moment does come you will face it prepared.

Most often, though, a sick or dying person hasn't been living with this sort of urgent alertness, so the first step in advising such a person is to aim at clearing away any emotional obstacles to learning from the present. The Pali texts note two such obstacles: worry over the responsibilities the person is leaving behind, and fear of death. In one poignant discourse, a man appears to be dying and his wife consoles him not to worry: She'll be able to provide for herself and their children in his absence; she won't go looking for another husband; and she'll continue in her practice of the dharma. With each reassurance she repeats the refrain, "So don't be worried as you die. Death is painful for one who is worried. The Blessed One has warned against being worried at the time of death." The man recovers unexpectedly and, while still frail, goes to visit the Buddha, telling him of his wife's reassurances. The Buddha comments on how fortunate the man is for having such a wise and sympathetic wife.

**...WE'RE ALL
SICK AND
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CONTINUAL
COMPASSION.**



...WHEN
YOU
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YOU'RE
GAINING
PRACTICE
IN HOW
TO DIE...

As for fear of death, the Buddha notes that one of the primary reasons for this fear is the remembrance of hurtful or cruel things you've done in the past. Thus the Vinaya shows that monks would often console a fellow monk on his deathbed by asking him to call to mind something more positive—his highest meditative attainment—and to focus his thoughts there. In a similar vein, a common practice in Asian Buddhist countries is to remind a dying person of the acts of generosity or virtue he or she has performed in this life. Even if the person is unable to muster the mindfulness and alertness needed to gain further insight into the present, any dharma talk that helps allay worries and forestall fears is an act of true compassion.



The Buddha comments, however, that there are three additional reasons for fearing death: attachment to the body, attachment to sensual pleasures, and a lack of direct insight into the unconditioned dharma of the Deathless. His more advanced instructions for sick and dying people thus focus on cutting these reasons for fear at the root. He once visited a sick ward and told the monks there to approach the moment of death mindful and alert. Instead of focusing on whether they would recover, they should observe the movements of the feelings they were experiencing: painful, pleasant, or neutral. Observing a sensation of pain, for instance, they should notice how inconstant it is and then focus on the repeated dissolution of all pains. They could then apply the same focused alertness to pleasant and neutral feelings as well. The steadiness of their focus would give rise to a sense of ease independent of sensory feelings, and from this point of independence they could develop dispassion and

relinquishment, both for the body and for feelings of any sort. With relinquishment would come a genuine insight into the dharma which, being Deathless, would end all fear of death.

On another occasion, Venerable Sariputta visited the famous supporter of the Buddha, Anathapindika, who was on his deathbed. After learning that Anathapindika's disease was worsening,

he advised him to train himself: "I won't cling to the eye; my consciousness won't be dependent on the eye. I won't cling to the ear; my consciousness won't be dependent on the ear," and so forth through all the six senses, their objects, and any mental events dependent on them. Although Anathapindika was unable to develop this independent consciousness in line with Sariputta's instructions, he asked that

these instructions be given to other lay people as well, for there would be those who would understand and benefit from them.

Obviously, these recommendations are all shaped by the Buddha's teachings on how the state of one's mind influences the process of death and rebirth, but that doesn't mean that they're appropriate only for those who would call themselves Buddhist. Regardless of your religious beliefs, when you're faced with obvious pain you're bound to see the value of any instructions that show you how to reduce suffering by investigating the pain in and of itself. If you have the strength to follow through with the instructions and if you encounter the Deathless in the course of your efforts, you're not going to quibble about whether to call it by a Buddhist or non-Buddhist name.

This point is illustrated by another story involving Venerable Sariputta. Visiting an aged brahman on his

MEDITATE AS AN ACT OF COMPASSION

BOTH FOR YOURSELF AND FOR OTHERS, EVEN IF DEATH SEEMS FAR AWAY.

deathbed, Sariputta reflected that brahmins desire union with Brahma, so he taught the man to develop the four attitudes of a Brahma — infinite good will, compassion, appreciation, and equanimity. After following these instructions, the brahman was reborn as a Brahma after death. The Buddha, however, later chided Sariputta for not teaching the brahman to focus instead on investigating pain, for if he had, the brahman would have experienced nirvana and been freed from rebirth altogether.

What's striking about all these instructions is that, from the Buddha's point of view, deathbed dharma is no different from dharma taught to people in ordinary health. *The cause of suffering is in every case the same, and the path to the end of suffering is the same as well: comprehend suffering, abandon its cause, realize its cessation, and develop the qualities of mind that lead to its cessation.* The only difference is that the obvious proximity of death makes teaching the dharma both easier and harder—easier in that the patient is freed from extraneous responsibilities and can see clearly the need to understand and gain release from pain; harder in that the patient may be too weakened physically or emotionally, through fear or worry, to put the instructions into practice. But whatever the case, it's worth noting that up to the moment of death the Buddha would have you focus less on the limitations of the situation than on the potential opportunities. Even one moment of insight in the midst of pain and suffering, he said, is worth more than one hundred years of good health.

From my own personal experience—both in watching my teachers implement these instructions and in trying to implement them myself—I've learned two major lessons. One is that the patients best suited for making the most of the dharma when sick or dying are those who are not tormented with memories of cruel or hurtful things they did in the past, and who have already developed a meditative or contemplative practice prior to their illness. Even if that practice isn't Buddhist, they intuitively respond to the Buddha's message on pain and are able to use it to alleviate their own sufferings. The lesson here is that as long as you know you're going to die someday, it's a good idea to avoid cruel actions and to get started on a meditative practice of your own, so that you'll be prepared for illness and death when they come.

Amy teacher, Ajahn Fuang, once said: *"when you meditate you're gaining practice in how to die—how to be mindful and alert, how to endure pain, how to gain control over wayward thoughts and maybe even reach the deathless—so that when the time comes to die, you'll do it with skill."*

The second lesson is that if you want to help other people overcome their fear of death, you have to learn how to overcome your own fear of death as well, by abandoning attachment to the body, abandoning attachment to sensual pleasures, avoiding cruel actions, and gaining direct insight into the Deathless. With your fears overcome, you'll be much more effec-

tive in teaching the dharma to those on their deathbed. You won't be disturbed by the physical horrors of death, you'll be able to communicate directly to the needs of the dying person, and your words will carry more weight, for they come from direct experience. Your compassion will be educated not by books or feelings, but by a clear insight into what dies and what doesn't.

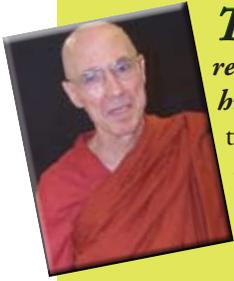
Ultimately, these two lessons boil down to one: Meditate, as an act of compassion both for yourself and for others, even if death seems far away. When the time comes to die, you'll be less of a burden on those who are caring for you. In the meantime, if you're called on to comfort those who are sick or dying, your compassion will be more genuinely helpful, and you'll have a more effective message to teach.



Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Geoffrey DeGraff) is an American monk of the Thai forest tradition. After graduating from college, he studied meditation under Ajahn Fuang Jotiko in Thailand, himself a student of the late Ajahn Lee, and was ordained in 1976. In 1991 he helped establish Metta Monastery in the hills of San Diego County, California, where he is currently the abbot. He is a prolific author and translator of the Pali scriptures.

TOWARD A BUDDHIST UNDERSTANDING OF GENEROSITY

by *Bhikkhu Bodhi*



The practice of giving is universally recognized as one of the most basic human virtues, a quality that testifies to the depth of one's humanity and one's capacity for self-transcendence.

In the teaching of the Buddha, too, the practice of giving claims a place of special eminence, one which singles it out as being in a sense the foundation and seed of spiritual development. In the Pali suttas we read time and again that "talk on giving" (*danakatha*) was invariably the first topic to be discussed by the Buddha in his "graduated exposition" of the dhamma. Whenever the Buddha delivered a discourse to an audience of people who had not yet come to regard him as their teacher, he would start by emphasizing the value of giving. Only after his audience had come to appreciate this virtue would he introduce other aspects of his teaching, such as morality, the law of kamma, and the benefits in renunciation, and only after all these principles had made their impact on the minds of his listeners would he expound to them that unique discovery of the awakened ones, the four noble truths.

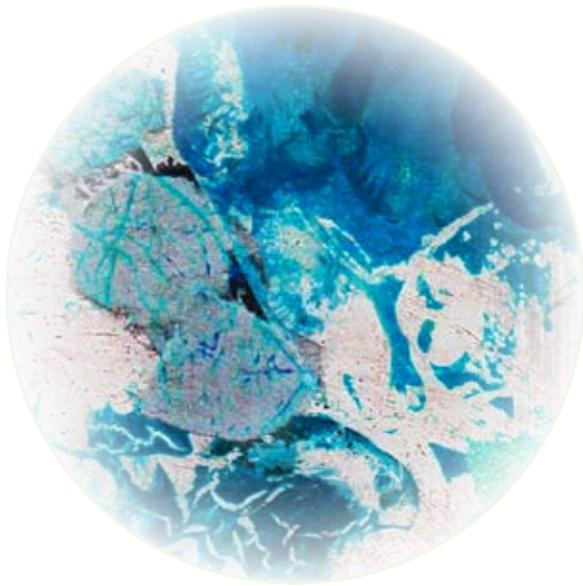
Strictly speaking, giving does not appear in its own right among the factors of the noble eightfold path, nor does it enter among the other requisites of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiya dhamma*). Most probably it has been excluded from these groupings because the practice of giving does not by its own nature conduce directly and immediately to the arising of insight and the realization of the four noble truths. Giving functions in the Buddhist discipline in a different capacity. It does not come at the apex of the path, as a factor constituent of the process of awakening, but rather it serves as a basis and preparation which underlies and quietly supports the entire endeavor to free the mind from the defilements.

Nevertheless, though giving is not counted directly among the factors of the path, its contribution to progress along the road to liberation should not be overlooked or underestimated. The prominence of this contribution is underscored by the place which the Buddha assigns to giving in various sets of practices he has laid down for his followers. Besides appearing as the first topic in the graduated exposition of the Dhamma, the practice of giving also figures as the first of the three bases of meritorious deeds (*punnakiriyavatthu*), as the first of the four means of benefiting others (*sangahavatthu*), and as the first of the ten paramis or "perfections." The latter are the sublime virtues to be cultivated by all aspirants to enlightenment, and to the most exalted degree by those who follow the way of the bodhisatta aimed at the supreme enlightenment of perfect Buddhahood.

Regarded from another angle, giving can also be identified with the personal quality of generosity (*caga*). This angle highlights the practice of giving, not as the outwardly manifest act by which an object is transferred from oneself to others, but as the inward disposition to give, a disposition which is strengthened by outward acts of giving and which in turn makes possible still more demanding acts of self-sacrifice. Generosity is included among the essential attributes of the *sappurisa*, the good or superior person, along with such other qualities as faith, morality, learning and wisdom. Viewed as the quality of generosity, giving has a particularly intimate connection to the entire movement of the Buddha's path. For the goal of the path is the destruction of greed, hate and delusion, and the cultivation of generosity directly debilitates greed and hate, while facilitating that pliancy of mind that allows for the eradication of delusion.

Bhikkhu Bodhi is an American Buddhist monk born in Brooklyn, New York in 1944. After earning a PhD in philosophy, he traveled to Sri Lanka where he became a Theravada monk receiving higher ordination in 1973. He has edited, authored, and translated extensively from the Pali literature. He is currently the president of the Sangha Council of Bodhi Monastery in New Jersey and the chairman of the Yin Shun Foundation.

The Core Teachings: **AN OVERVIEW**



**Editor
Xianyang
Carl Jerome
introduces
and explains
15 of
Buddhism's
key
teachings.**

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The four noble truths summarize the Buddha's view of the human condition and how best to live our lives. The first noble truth explains the basic nature of life as dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), which the second noble truth says is caused by craving or clinging (attachment). The third noble truth assures us that the attaching cycle can be stopped and the suffering brought to an end, and the fourth noble truth then explains the eight-fold path as the means to accomplish this.

Bodhidharma, the first Zen patriarch, presented us with a more concise version of the four noble truths:

- (1) suffering injustice
- (2) adapting to conditions
- (3) seeking nothing and
- (4) practicing the dharma.

On a somewhat deeper level still, the first noble truth reveals impermanence, no-self, emptiness, the five skandhas, and conditionality. The second noble truth deals with karma and dependent origination, furthering our understanding of the concepts in the first noble truth. At this level, the third noble truth is the profound truth of nirvana, (which some consider to be inexplicable in words,) and the fourth noble truth is the practice path. On an even deeper level, all of this can be experienced as a meta-praxis—a skillful means to get us to the other shore, where we are then encouraged to abandon the ship.



THE BODHISATTVA

In the Chinese Mahayana tradition, each of us on the Buddhist path is a bodhisattva, a being (sattva) seeking awakening (bodhi). A bodhisattva, therefore, is a person who is committed to a life of compassion and to saving all beings. Chan Master Yin Shun tells us that a bodhisattva lives in accord with the five precepts and the ten meritorious deeds.

It needs to be added here, however, that in the Chinese Buddhist scriptural literature there are several different types of bodhisattvas, such as past-life bodhisattvas and deity bodhisattvas. When viewed together, these provide a strong and decidedly Chinese Mahayana image for a bodhisattva as (1) a supernatural being of immeasurable compassion and wisdom, (2) a spiritual map which indicates that through cultivation enlightenment is attainable, and (3) compassionate, powerful personal deities which occupy a prominent position in devotional practice.



MEDITATION

Meditation is the central practice of Buddhism. It is the place from which all the teachings arise. Without meditation Buddhism is just words, and words alone can be a source of suffering, not a practice to end it.

There are two basic types of meditation practiced in Buddhism: (1) shamatha/ concentration meditation (which includes vipassana meditation) and (2) analytic meditation. Concentration meditation, in which one focuses on a meditation object, such as one's breath, is the most common type of meditation and is used to stabilize the mind. Analytic meditation, which is usually preceded by concentration meditation, involves the use of koans or questions and is meant to move one beyond one's discursive mind into the realm of pure experience.



THE PRECEPTS

The precepts are behavioral guidelines. They provide the footing from which self-control and restraint can emerge; practicing with them leads to clarity, appropriate and beneficial decision-making, and to lives of peace and harmony.

Each of the five major precepts produces consequences that further spiritual development.

(1) **No killing** allows us to live in communities with a fundamental sense of trust, not to constantly have to be on guard for fear of losing our life or for fear of those close to us losing their lives—and these build gratitude and selflessness, respect for others, and allow for the development of such qualities as lovingkindness and compassion.

(2) **No stealing** leads to a sense of generosity, sympathetic joy and the bodhisattva ideal.

(3) **No sexual misconduct** allows us to build loving families and supportive communities; it deepens our practice by encouraging self-control and restraint in the face of temptation.

(4) **No lying builds** trust-worthiness, dependability, and honesty, providing the groundwork for the practice of equanimity and diminishing conditions that would lead to ill-will.

Without this precept, the foundation for all interpersonal relationships would collapse.

(5) **No intoxicants** builds trust-worthiness and dependability; it makes us alert to temptation and keeps us in a clear mind state. It supports our efforts to meditate, and ultimately see who we really are.

When it comes to practicing with the precepts, nothing is black and white; everything is gray and situational, and we make decisions in the gray area based on acceptance of karmic responsibility and an analysis of the situation in terms of the act, the intention, and the outcome. For example, issues that arise from no killing might include assisted suicide or euthanasia, suicide, 'putting down' pets, hunting and fishing for sport vs. hunting and fishing to prevent starvation, eating meat vs. vegetarianism, etc.

The precepts are not meant to limit behavior; rather, they give guidance and support for actions that will benefit ourselves and others, or at the very least, do no harm.

THE SIX PARAMITAS

The six paramitas are practices that are the outcome of wisdom.

The deeper our practice, the more naturally these arise; the more we practice them, the deeper our practice becomes. They might be considered another developmental series, like the eightfold noble path, leading to liberation. These are both the behaviors of an enlightened being and the behaviors that can lead to enlightenment.

In the Mahayana or bodhisattva traditions emphasis is placed on the paramitas because these are wisdom-oriented traditions that trace their origins to the Heart Sutra. And the paramitas are, after all, the Heart Sutra in action!

(1) **Generosity**, the first of the paramitas, is sometimes viewed as the essence of the bodhisattva ideal and the most important practice of all, but that is not to diminish the importance and relevance of the other five paramitas:

(2) **Living an ethical life**

(3) **Patience** (the antidote for anger)

(4) **The four great efforts** (abandon, restrain, develop and maintain)

(5) **Concentration**

(6) **Wisdom**

Rather than thinking of these as separate practices, it might be beneficial to see them forming a team, like the dogs on a dog sled, with generosity as the lead. Although there is a guide at the front, movement is dependent on all the members of the team working in tandem.



WISDOM

Along with compassion, wisdom is seen as both a goal and an outcome of Buddhist practice. In one sense, wisdom means realizing the four noble truths—seeing that life is characterized by suffering because we attach to the deluded idea that reality is somehow permanent,—and that it is possible to end our delusion and eliminate suffering by following the eightfold path.

On a more profound level, wisdom is the direct experience of things (phenomena) as empty of a permanent, fixed identity. Wisdom is directly realizing that everything, including our “self,” is a product of our mind, and further realizing that “emptiness is form, form is emptiness,” as the Heart Sutra states. Wisdom means clearly understanding that all things are the result of conditioned causality.

KARMA

Karma isn't complicated; it is simply the law of cause and effect. In its simplest formulation, karma can be understood as "If this, then that."



In other words, our actions have consequences. We can't know exactly what or when those consequences will appear because there are too many causal factors in the world that interact with each other and with our actions.

An understanding of karma motivates us to act in accord with the five precepts. It tells us that we are absolutely and solely responsible for what happens to us. And in a profound way, karma explains where we came from, what we are doing here, what to do while we are here, and what it will be like for us after this life. And in Nagarjuna's explanation, on still another level, karma becomes conditioned causality—a series of empty predispositions toward action.

DEPENDENT ORIGATION

Dependent origination is generally taught as deriving from the second noble truth. It is often presented as a sequence of twelve, each forming a condition for the arising of the next, and together comprising samsara, the cycle of birth and death. On the surface, it seems to go like this: our ignorance of the true nature of things leads to the creation of volitional formations, which causes our consciousness to move forward, consciousness giving rise to name-and-form, name and form being conditioned by the six sense bases which make contact with form (thinking is considered a "sense" as well as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching.), which causes the I-like/don't-like feelings to arise, which creates the conditions for craving, and then clinging, which leads to becoming (identifying as a separate, disconnected entity), which leads to birth, which results in aging and death in ignorance. In this manner, the cycle repeats, again and again, moment after moment, life after life.

Superficially, this concept looks like a 12-link chain, presenting the linear sequence of events inherent in each moment and each life, starting with ignorance and ending with death. When we look more deeply, however, we see that dependent origination explains how dukkha arises

and where we can break the chain and end dukkha. On an even deeper level, this is a description of the causally conditioned nature of all phenomena and a profound explanation of impermanence and emptiness. At its deepest level, it is a description of no-self. When we understand dependent origination beyond its linear appearance, as a process beyond words, we have penetrated emptiness. That's why the Buddha said, "to understand dependent origination is to understand the dharma."

FAITH

Faith in Buddhism is simply a trust, based on personal experience that the teachings of the Buddha work. Faith is a confidence in the validity of the teachings when we see them work in our lives and when we see that these ideas and practices really can and do provide us with the tools to relieve suffering.



While some practitioners are inspired by faith, others are inspired by compassion and yet others by wisdom. However, it would seem that faith, and the cultivation of faith, are the key to successful practice.

If we wish to benefit from practicing the Dharma, cultivating and strengthening our faith is necessary. Why? Because if we lack faith we can never practice wholeheartedly and our practice will not be there for us in times of stress. And if we cannot practice wholeheartedly when it is most needed, our practice may ultimately falter and fail us.

THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES

LOVINGKINDNESS
COMPASSION
SYMPATHETIC JOY
EQUANIMITY



Sometimes called the Four Heavenly Abodes, these four states of mind allow us to remain harmonious and peaceful, regardless of our circumstances or surroundings.

Lovingkindness is a strong wish for others to be happy. In practice, lovingkindness is offered freely and without any expectation of personal gain, reward, or benefit. An offering made in this way, from a base of pure selflessness, is immediately understood

by others as positive and wholesome, and this establishes conditions that will allow more lovingkindness to arise and real benefit to occur.

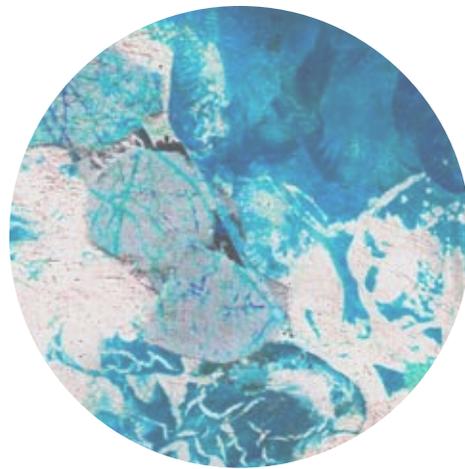
The Buddhadharmā teaches us to be diligent about being unreservedly kind. Practicing with lovingkindness, developing a mind of lovingkindness, is one of the most effective practices for being of benefit to others, for producing harmony in our lives and in the lives of others, and for producing calm and peace within.

Compassion is the empathic feeling that urges us into action to benefit others and ultimately to end suffering. Being compassionate is an outpouring of our own happiness, a happiness that we find increasing in ourselves the more we practice with this and the other three heavenly abodes.

Sympathetic Joy is a selfless feeling of happiness when we see success, prosperity, and good fortune in others. Sympathetic joy is an infinitely wide mood that is utterly removed from suffering. It is unconditional joy for the welfare of others.

Equanimity is the tranquil state that comes from greeting each moment, each situation, with an open heart and mind, neither hindered by preconceptions nor overpowered by the delusions of everyday life.

As long as we practice giving generously and selflessly of the four immeasurables, we will be inclined to continuous and ever-increasing good behaviors, and to the happiness that derives from the courage and confidence of a solid practice.



IMPERMANENCE

While it may appear that we are the same person we were when we woke up this morning, obviously we have changed since then. We have grown a little older, matured physically, developed psychologically, many of our cells have died and been regenerated, and so on. We have changed. And if we understand that, the rational extension of that view is that all phenomena are impermanent.

The traditional explanation goes like this: because everything is constantly changing (I) as a result of everything moving through time and

(2) as a result of everything arising from causes and conditions, in the Buddhist view anything we do, say, think, feel, see, taste, touch, smell or hear (everything inside and outside us) is impermanent.

In other words, nothing is or can be permanent because at the instant it arises in this moment, it decays and ceases, producing new causes and conditions, which in turn produce a new phenomenon to arise and instantly repeat the cycle of arising, decaying, and ceasing.

Once we understand impermanence, we begin to see the world differently and we can begin the real work of reshaping our lives and our world.



NO-SELF

We all know who we are and have ways of identifying our “self”: I am Annette the mother of twin girls, or I am Michael the lawyer, or I am a marathon runner. Because we are human and psycholinguistic animals we cling to what we identify as our “self.” Consequently, we are anxious and unsure because our clinging forces us into a cycle of protecting and defending as permanent something that will never be impermanent.

From the perspective of the Buddhadharmā, however, there is no such thing as a self. For there to be an abiding self, it would have to meet four criteria: it would have to be permanent, unchanging, in control and independent. Let’s look rationally at why we are neither permanent nor unchanging, neither in control nor independent.

Generally we tend to identify our self with our body. As we know, from the moment of conception to the moment of our death, our bodies are perpetually changing—temporally we are perpetually arising, decaying, and ceasing moment after moment, physically we are perpetually

being born, decaying, dying and being reborn. So from the perspective of time and space, we are neither permanent nor unchanging. As we cannot stop the clock, as we cannot stop ourselves from maturing and aging and dying, obviously we are not in control. And as we cannot break free of the grip of aging, sickness and death, we cannot say we are independent.

On a more profound level, the self can be viewed as a perpetual blending and reblending of the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, volitional actions, and consciousness) in combination and unity with the four great elements (earth, water, fire, and air).

The absence of a substantial, permanent, abiding self, it must be noted, stands as the foundation of the middle way.



NIRVANA

Nirvana is considered by some to be the most profound and difficult concept in the Buddhadharmā. It is impossible to do any more than hint at its nature in words, which is what we are attempting here, based on the great Chinese Master Yin Shun’s description of nirvana in *The Three Essentials of Buddhist Practice*.

When the Buddha’s disciples wanted a description of nirvana, the Buddha provided an illustration: holding a burning torch in his hand, he waved it. The fire was extinguished. The Buddha then asked, “Where did the fire go?” It was impossible to explain where the fire went. The cessation of life and death, which is the realization of nirvana, is like this. We can say that somebody has entered the state of nirvana; but we cannot say that he or she is still an individual entity. We can say that the water from one river has flowed into another river, but we may not expect to separate the waters of the two rivers

once they have merged. Similarly, in nirvana all things are integrated into one absolute equanimity. The scripture says, “the extinguished is immeasurable.” Nirvana (extinction) cannot be measured in amount, number, time, weight, space, or in any other way. In nirvana nothing is distinguishable. Once entering nirvana, where one came from and where one has gone are no longer traceable.

This means that the person is nowhere and everywhere. This is why it is so difficult to understand, for we must not try to understand it through 'I' or any concept related to 'I.' Until we have shaken off our 'I,' we cannot grasp nirvana.

After attaining nirvana, the body and mind are vanished and extinguished. The meanings of vanish, extinguish and tranquil are synonymous. In nirvana, there is no difference between 'I' and you, between self and other. After entering nirvana, eternity is indeed eternity because everything perfect does not increase, decrease or change.



DUKKHA

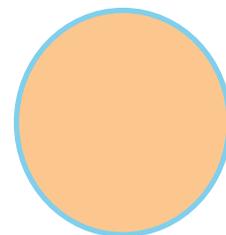
Sitting under the bodhi tree 2500 years ago, the Buddha realized that the fundamental nature of everything was dukkha. The word was later transcribed and translated as 'suffering.'

Dukkha in the Pali language has a very broad and sometimes quite subtle meaning; 'suffering' is too strong a word for it, and too limited in scope.

Dukkha points to unsatisfactoriness, disappointment, dis-ease in the sense of discomfort, a generalized sense of anxiety, apprehension, uneasiness, impermanence, imperfection, insubstantiality, and so on. And it means these individually and collectively at the same time. Dukkha is the opposite of sukha which is ease or well-being in the sense of being comfortable.

Moving beyond the word itself, the oldest teachings of the Buddhadharma list eight kinds of dukkha. Four arise from our physicality: from birth, from old age, from sickness, and from death; and four arise from our more subtle, change-based nature: the dukkha of being apart from those we love, from being with those we dislike, from not getting what we want, and from “the blaze of the five skandhas,” meaning our misconception that there is a self. Since everything in life falls within one of these eight categories, everything is dukkha, life is dukkha.

Understanding this fundamental nature of life, however, shouldn't be seen as pessimistic, for it is through this understanding that we find liberation from delusion and misperceptions that keep us caught in the cycles of birth and death.





THE FIVE SKANDHAS

In Buddhist phenomenology, the five skandhas (sometimes translated as aggregates) are experiential factors that make up what we think of as the self. Bound up in their ever-changing nature, they are comprised of:

form (rupa)
feeling (vedana)
perception (sanna)
mental formations (samskaras)
consciousness (vijnana)

Briefly, the five skandhas operate this way: when we make a sense contact, when we see something [form], a physical sensation arises [feeling] from that contact, a sensation that is either positive or negative. This leads to recognizing the object [perception] and to the full understanding of what is seen and thoughts about how to respond to it [volitional formations]. We then identify ourselves as this person who understands the sight in this way, making our consciousness of who we are a reflection of this process.

The Heart Sutra teaches the inherent empty nature of the five skandhas.





CHICAGOAN **JODY WILSON** REFLECTS ON THE
RELATIVE AND ABSOLUTE MEANINGS
OF THAT PESKY CONCEPT,
PERFECTION.

**EVERYTHING IS PERFECT, BUT THERE IS A
LOT OF ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT.**

—*Shunryu Suzuki*

per'f_ect *a.,n., & v.* 1. *a.* Complete, not deficient; faultless; thoroughly trained or skilled (*in* duties, etc.); (colloq.) Exceedingly satisfactory; exact; precise, (*a perfect* square, circle); entire, unqualified, (*a perfect* stranger; *perfect nonsense*);

Some say that the Buddhist insistence on the perfection of things as they are is pessimistic, passive, and nihilistic. But people forget that included in the Buddhist idea of perfection is our desire to improve conditions for ourselves and for others. For example, famine can't be "exceedingly satisfactory" to any right-minded individual. But our desire to alleviate famine, to find ways to feed people, is included in the Buddhist conception of perfection. And, as a bonus, we get to ask ourselves another tough question: who decides who is "right-minded."

The definition of perfect as "complete, not deficient," is much closer to the mark. Every moment, all things in the moment, all energies and possibilities available to us in each present moment of awareness is complete. It's all here. It may not be what we want. It may not be what we think we need, but it's all here. Now.

We think too small; it's all micro to most of us. I know what "exceedingly satisfactory" means to me. It means that all of my ego preferences and expectations are met. Getting what I want, when I want it: perfect. Not getting what I want: not perfect. Well, it may not be. But it is "complete, not deficient."

Today as I sit in mindfulness—even if only for a few moments—I will be, in those few moments, in the presence of a much larger idea of perfection than my own small self desires.



First You Play The Han



by Zoe Kaufman

The Zen Center is an austere, masculine place but it also has that certain hush that is feminine—the smell of incense burning, very spare and lovely. It has a kind of blazing feeling that I think of as very, very Zen. I'd been going there for about three years when one day, just before an evening sitting, Sensei strides up to me, his eyes glowing. He is built like a square block, dense and heavy, lots of atoms packed close together and he marches down the halls, so emphatic, his hands in fists, and says, "From now on you are the han player. Steve will show you how." Then he turns around and marches away.

"But, Sensei" I call out to his retreating figure, "I don't want to play the han." My voice is tremulous, helpless, but he is gone. Sensei doesn't discuss things, he just says something and you respond. This is how it is here. You obey because he is the teacher.

It is true I want to know how to play the han, but I do not want to actually play the han. Not for a real sitting. I'm shy. And I hate performing. Besides, sitting is already hard enough. But it's too late. Sensei is gone. I have to obey partly because of the force of his own nature and because this is the tradition.

I am standing in the hallway and people are drifting into the center. The han is in the zendo but I have never even gotten close to it. You could be sitting there for years and never know who was playing the han. It hangs from the ceiling but everyone sits facing the walls not the center of the room. You have to pay attention. The playing of the Han is what starts the sitting. The han is huge, about half the size of someone's front door. It hangs horizontally from two ropes and the mallet is big, like a sculpture mallet but all wood. The center of the han is pitted, almost carved out from all the times it has been hit, with great precision in the center of the board. The hollow in the center fans out gradually from the center, the color fading into the rest of the board.

“Well,” I console myself. “How hard can it be? It’s just a hammer and a block of wood”. After all, I’m not altogether unmusical. At times in my life I have mastered Bach partitas, Chopin preludes and Beethoven sonatas. I have learned to cantillate ancient Hebrew according to rabbinic trope. I guess I can hit a piece of wood with a stick.

After the sitting Steve, who is very skinny and wears little round glasses, explains the han riff: one loud strike, two soft. Then, one loud, one soft; one loud, one soft. Repeat several times. End with two soft, one loud. “Piece of cake,” I say, immediately forgetting everything Steve has just told me. Was it loud soft soft or loud loud soft? “No,” says Steve, who patiently explains the riff again. “Play as loud as you can,” he says. “Make the soft an echo. Then pause.

“How long is the pause?”

“Count all the states between Mexico and New England,” says Steve.

When it was clear I still did not understand how he wanted me to play, he made me a little diagram; triangles on a little piece of newspaper. This did nothing to improve my understanding.

“Count all the states? I don’t even know the states next to my state. “Does it have to be states?” I ask.

I try it again. Steve is kind enough not to overtly humiliate me, but my louds are not loud and my softs are not soft. Perplexed, I look at the mallet.

“Hold the mallet loosely,” says Steve. “Hold it farther down the handle.”

I try again. Now the louds are soft and the softs are inaudible!

“Practice!” says Steve.

At home, my husband is bewildered by the sounds of hammering coming from the kitchen chopping board. But practice is useless. A chopping board and a hammer are not, after all, the same as a han. There is something about a han.

After only about one week of practice on my useless chopping board I arrive

If you use your small mind you’re always wrong. Small mind is always worrying. Big mind nails it every time.

at the Zen center and I am astounded to learn that I am playing the han for tonight’s sitting. “Me?” I ask Steve in true bewilderment. I say I’m not ready. Steve is sympathetic but there’s no way out.

I run through the other chores of the han player: I check the house. I make sure no one is arriving late and that the front door is locked. I turn off the phones. I arrive in the zendo, stand at the han and wait for the signal from the monitor.

“Loud soft soft” I remind myself. I strike the han. “That was too soft,” I say. I strike again. Too loud. I strike again. Not enough pause. “Texas, Tennessee, Arkansas, Illinois” I say. And Kentucky.” I add. “No that’s too far south,” I say. I decide to forget about counting. Suddenly I realize that counting the states is ridiculous.

Counting the states in not being in the moment!

I am now officially the han player every time I come to an evening sitting, which is at least once, sometimes twice a week. Months go by. I have played the han perhaps fifty times, and every time I have found a different way to play it wrong. The complexity of the thing is baffling. The variations in it’s sound are endless and there is no discernible way to control it.

I am assigned to play the han for a six day sesshin. In sesshin the han is played several times a day, so by the third morning the mallet feels more friendly in my hand. I strike the han. “That’s it,” I say. At last, mastery!

But during kinhin, the walking meditation, Wilson, the monitor, draws me aside and whispers “You are playing the han too loud.” I am shocked. Did Wilson not hear my confident, round, and resonant han strokes in the morning sitting? I am bewildered. I resolve to play the han more softly.

I finish sesshin and resume my normal duties playing the han for evening sittings. Each time I play the han I renew my resolve: my softs will be exquisite and almost inaudible; my pauses will luxuriate; my rhythm will be smooth and even; and my louds will not be loud! But the han is my foe. It stares at me with its smooth, simple surface, I continue to find new, incorrect ways to play it.

One night Steve takes me aside.

“Zoe,” he says. “You are playing the han too softly.”

What?!?!

“Hit it hard!” he says. “Louds should be loud. Softs should be soft.”

“Louds loud,” I say, “softs soft.”

I go back to playing loudly but now my softs are wildly unpredictable. Some are soft, it’s true, but some are medium and some are loud. I am horrified at my incapacity. A year has gone by and I can’t hit a piece of wood with a mallet correctly three times in a row. I would like to walk away from it, but I’ve been in Zen long enough to know there’s no way out. This playing of the han is my existential predicament. I am the han player. I have to play the han.



More months go by and I am again standing at the han. “This time I ‘m gonna do it right!” I resolve. I strike the han. Once, twice, three times. Loud, soft soft. “Wow” I say. “That’s it!” I say. My louds are loud and my softs are soft. I am exultant.

After the sitting, Wilson, who is in attendance, takes me aside.

“Zoë, you are playing the han too loud,” he says. “Play it s-o-f-t-l-y.”

“G-r-r-r” I say to myself. At this moment I am not developing compassion. I am gnashing my teeth.

Now fear grips me every time I face the han. “There are a limitless number of ways to play this thing wrong,” I realize, as I confront it again. It is the first day of another long sesshin. I play the first loud. Too soft. I play the two softs. Too loud. And uneven. And too fast. I have finished playing the han and walk to the spot where I will sit today. My footsteps thunder as I walk to my seat.

The next time I am at the han I jump when the mallet is suddenly snatched from my hand. I whirl around and see Sensei standing with the mallet in his hand and a gleam in his eye. I take my seat and listen carefully.

Loud soft soft, says the han. Loud soft. Loud soft. Soft soft loud.

“Oh,” I say.

Because no one plays the han louder than Sensei. Wham. Echo. Gorgeous. Very, very loud. Very loud. I resolve to ignore Wilson and play like Sensei at the very next opportunity.

Soon enough I am at the han again. “Play like Sensei” I say to myself. I hit the Han. LOUD, soft soft. Zen IN ACTION. Wham. Echo. Gorgeous!!

After the sitting Sensei takes me aside.

“Zoë”, he says. “You are playing the han too loud.”

Now my head is spinning and I am speechless. I am about to argue with him, but instead I remain silent. I recognize this spinning feeling, this utter bewilderment, and I know simply that I do not know and that I will never understand.

I continue to play the han. More weeks go by, and months. I wonder why in the world Sensei chose me to be the han player. I play the han both too loud and too soft. My playing is both sluggish and too fast; my repetitions both too many and not enough, my pauses both too short and too long. I hold the mallet too tight and too loose, too high up on the handle and too low. When I finish playing I walk to my seat both too slowly and too fast, and too loudly. (And, I forget to turn the phone off as well as on.)

I decide I have flunked out at this very, very complex thing, this piece of wood and a stick. I am sure I am the worst han player since Bodhidharma crossed the China sea.

Every once in a while Wilson takes me aside and tells me to play softer. Steve tells me to play louder. We now have a new chant leader who tells me to lengthen my pauses. He then demonstrates by playing very short pauses.

And so time passes.

One day when I arrive at the zendo, Sensei says to me, "I'll play the han today". He takes the mallet and plays the han. On this day, I hear. This is how Sensei plays the han: First he plays the han. Then he stops. Then he sits down.

It's true there are an infinite number of wrong ways to play the han. But now that I have heard, I know that there is one right way to play the han. This is how you do it:

First play the han. When you are done, stop. Then, sit down.

How complicated can it be?



In the morning, **Zoe Kaufman** teaches and practices Yoga in a northern suburb of Chicago. After that, she paints in her studio. She practiced with koans in the Rinzai tradition for nearly a decade before shifting to a Chan at MABA.

POETRY



KO UN

Ko Un, SSN,* is Korea's foremost living writer. After immense suffering during the Korean War, he became a Buddhist monk. His first poems were published in 1958, then a few years later he returned to the secular world. He has published more than 120 volumes of poems, essays, and fiction and has been nominated for a Nobel Prize several times.

*SSN, or *Soen Sunim*, is the Korean equivalent in Buddhism of Master or Venerable.

From the forthcoming book, *Songs of Tomorrow*
(Green Integer, 2008) translated from Korean by
Brother Anthony, Young-moo Kim and Gary Gach

Ch'on-un Temple

They live
in a world all their own

Their spirits float
below the valleys and up on high
Echoes of wind

They are
a sound of night wind in pines

Bare mountain slopes
Boulders

Autumn is coming

As the sound of the wind-bells
drops weeping from the rock-perched
eaves to temple courtyards

they live
in a world all their own

Now, back in the world, all that forgotten,
they long to return to the slopes
swept by the spirit wind

where they live

they
live

Resting

The era when you galloped on horseback
is past, but not gone. Another era
for galloping on horseback is here.
Earn what you need for each day
Then take it easy, eating and resting.
Azaleas still blossom all round you.
Sighing is not sorrow. When you stop to
sigh, kites in the sky seem to pause as well.

True rest should be
the mind's highest state.



Grave Memories

In my youth I was quite fascinated by graves, especially
the 680 graves in Hwangdung Public Cemetery.

On my way home at night, I used to pass out
in the Sarabong Cemetery on Cheju Island.

I made quite a habit of sleeping beside graves.

Word spread.

Folks started calling me the Sarabong Ghost.

After someone died and a new grave appeared,
I used to be so glad.

"You've come at last!

Welcome, friend!

You're nowhere as well off as here," I'd say.

I was so glad.

When night fell,
I'd drink and drink
until utterly intoxicated.

As I passed the new grave, I'd pass out and snooze.

Once, at dawn a centipede bit me.

For a whole week, one side of my face

Was aching and swollen
the size of a pumpkin.

Once, as a novice monk
on my way to nearby Mirae Temple in T'ongyong
I spent half a day in a cemetery.

I'd completely forgotten the errand I was on.

Later, the head monk would give me hell.

Decades have since floated by
And now I've finally realized:
animals don't make graves.

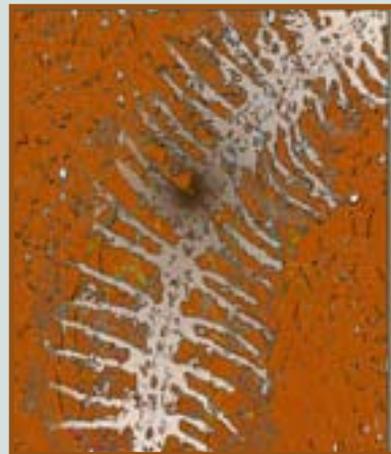
Thus animals are better than people,
since they leave behind no tomb.

Thus animals are better than God,
a hundred times better than me.

Is that why I used to be so fond of graves?

So I could realize that one thing?

Is that why I used to cry and cry?



Sorrow

In my native village, two baby fawns died,
shot in the same moment by hunters' arrows.
Their mother came galloping up,
circled the spot, out of her mind,
then fell down dead.
No arrow touched her,
she just fell down dead.

When that mother deer was cut open,
they found her twenty-yard-long gut
ripped apart
by the sorrow of losing her fawns.

In this world, everything that exists
must experience sorrow, it's true,
but can hers be called mere sorrow?
Real sorrow has always been heart-rending
Tonight, I'll bury my own little snack of sorrow
quietly in a hole in the ground.

Next year, or the year after,
fragrant mugwort might come sprouting
from the secretly buried sorrow,
but how could that
equal the death of the mother deer?

To bring birth and the beginning of a new
world with imperishable sorrow,
the crimson sun of dawning day
hastens far away.



In the House of Prabhutaratna

In notes to the Lotus Sutra it is reported that
Shakyamuni Buddha, after spending eighty
years traveling bare-footed throughout the
Ganges Valley,
left the earth, went up to heaven,
and visited Prabhutaratna Buddha
in his abode.

The two of them set up house together.
Prabhutaratna's face grew brighter than before
while the face of his guest Sakyamuni
also shone exceedingly bright.

The two got on well together.

Then a bodhisattva declared
Prabhutaratna was the Sakyamuni of the past
while Sakyamuni was the Prabhutaratna of this
present age, so the two became completely one.
The house of Prabhutaratna Buddha,
all this time ringing with talk,
grew very quiet.

Being one Buddha can be very boring, it seems.
So he went around sleeping with various stars,
one tonight, another tomorrow,
another the night after.

A penniless child down on earth
gazed up every night

at the stars roaming around the sky.

Translators' notes : Shakyamuni ("Sage from the Shakya Clan") is an epithet applied to Siddharta Gautama, also known as the Buddha ("Awakened"). According to some schools of Buddhism, there have been numerous other Buddhas throughout time, who've attained nirvana, ultimate enlightenment. One such ancient Buddha is known as Prabhutaratna ("Myriad Jewels"). While some schools teach that one who has attained nirvana ceases entirely to exist after physical death, the Buddhist scripture entitled The Lotus Sutra teaches that nirvana is not annihilation. As a sign of this, it tells that when Shakyamuni Buddha was preaching its contents, Prabhutaratna appeared in his abode to hear him. A bodhisattva is a person who is ready for or who has even attained enlightenment but has also vowed to help all beings become enlightened.

Drawing Maps

I was drawing maps again today.
I drew the North Sea between England
and Norway
and the shores of the Gulf of Pohai in
the East,
then I tore up all my maps. This was
not it, I felt.
This really wasn't it.
Just then
the wind spoke, knocking at my
window.
“Poor little guy. You should draw a
new world, not the usual modern
map.” Not only wind, but wind and
rain spoke together, knocking at my
window. Trying to ignore
my growling stomach, I started
drawing maps again.
Not like before,
but tomorrow's maps,
with no America...
no Asia ...

East Sea Lotus Flowers

A mighty babe arose
threw a stone
at the sky
beyond the hills
and the stone
that one stone
showered down
as an avalanche
for decades after.
One stone landed
in the East Sea at dawn
just in front of Naksan Temple
and blossomed
into so many dazzling bright
lotus flowers!
They still float there, dazzlingly bright.



Translators' notes: The East Sea lies between Korea and Japan. Naksan Temple rises on the edge of the sea, south of the city of Sokch'o. The sea in front of it is studded with rocks.

Brother Anthony of Taizé

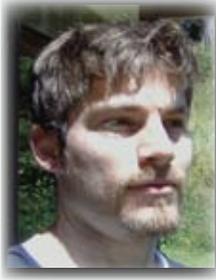
Born in Truro, in Great Britain, Brother Anthony is one of the foremost living translators of contemporary Korean poetry, with over 26 titles to his credit. He is currently Emeritus Professor, Department of English Language and Literature at Sogang University, Seoul, where he has taught since 1980.

Young-moo Kim

(1944– 2001, Korea) was Professor at Seoul National University, and is well-known in Korea as a literary critic and poet. He published three volumes of poetry and together with Brother Anthony, he translated and published poems by many of the most respected and appreciated Korean poets of the 20th century, including Ko Un.

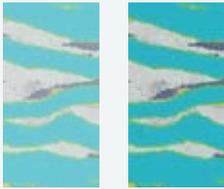
Gary Gach

Gary Gach is editor of *What Book!?!—Buddha Poems from Beat to Hip-hop* (Parallax Press; American Book Award) and author of *Preparing the Ground: Poems 1960-1970* (Heirs, International) and *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Buddhism* (Alpha Books). His poems and translations have been published in numerous magazines and anthologies.



Just Observe... Just Observe

San Francisco free-lance writer **Tony Brasunas** recently attended his first vipassana 10-day retreat. In this article he describes his experiences, both painful and blissful, with humor and insight.



"Just observe," said the guru's voice. "Whatever the sensation, just observe." I had been seated cross-legged, eyes closed, for what felt like hours and had probably been at least 15 minutes. The pain shooting through my back was excruciating.

"Limit your awareness to the triangular area below the nostrils and above the upper lip." He had a perfect Indian guru accent and he said the word 'nostrils' as if it were 'nose-strils'. It made me smile. My 'nose-streels.' I desperately wanted to know if anyone else was smiling, and so for the first time in what had to have been at least 18 minutes now, I opened my eyes. There we were, 200 or so of us, seated silently on the floor of a vast, wood-walled, slightly drafty hall that was vaulted like a church, but if there was a Jesus up there above the raised dais on which sat the solemn 'assistant teachers,' He had been carefully and discreetly covered by white sheeting. Down here on the floor, we meditators were seated in precise rows, as if on a chessboard. I was in spot F-9. The guy on my right, F-8, was starting to slouch forward, forward, to stretch his back. The guy right in front of me, E-9, was unmoving, a solid rock of a meditator. I was surrounded by men. On the other side of the 'A' row was an aisle, and the women were seated on the other side of the aisle. Indeed, throughout the entire ten days, the men and women were strictly segregated and we never saw each other. I discreetly

glanced around me; many men were silently shifting positions in discomfort. There were no smiles.

"Limit your awareness to the triangular area below the nostrils..." said the guru. "The focus of your mind..." I closed my eyes again and his voice went silent. My mind focused on my legs, and then on the cushion below me, and then I wondered if some people's cushions were softer than others, and then I thought about how I always want what others have, and then came the saying 'the grass is always greener on the other side,' and that made me think of the place in China where I'd been where the grass really had been greener on the other side, and that made me think of rural China, and that made me think of great rural Chinese food, and that made me wonder whether the food tonight was going to be good, and that made me think that often these retreats are expensive and have great food, but this one is free and maybe we just get bread and water, and then I thought as long as there's butter for the bread that would be tasty....

"Limit your awareness to the triangular area...."

That's how the first day went. The second day was about the same, or worse. I couldn't limit my awareness to my head, let alone to my nostrils. There still were no smiles. And there certainly wasn't any laughter. It was more of a shell-shocked concentration camp kind of vibe. Were we all doing some kind of suffering solidarity

project? I couldn't remember. We were observing noble silence, which means not only do you not talk, ever, but you don't communicate at all, ever. No gestures, no nodding, no shrugging, no sign language. No eye contact. I was starving not only for some kind of food in the evening (lunch was served at 11am and there was no dinner), but for some kind of human interaction. For some reason I couldn't remember, I had chosen to spend the holiday season in cold and silence.

Also there was no reading, no writing, no 'rithmetic. No ipods, no iphones, no icomputers, no idrinks at fun bars, no ichocolates to sweeten the day, no ilaughter with friends. No imusic at all. And the ibell rang at 4am every imorning to wake us up. And then we would iwalk to the meditation hall and start the day. I couldn't believe it was going to go on for 10 days like this.

I made it from day to day by listening to the guru's words in the evening discourse. "You are here to learn how to eradicate suffering," he said during one night's lecture on Buddhism. "Give this a chance." I had tried many things in life, I told myself, I could try this for ten days.

The day started at 4, and by the time my head hit the pillow at 9:30 each night, I had meditated at least 10 hours. Or at least pretended to meditate. I sat there and watched my legs and back scream in pain and my attention roam wildly over my life, my relationships, my projects, my regrets, my highlight reel of pleasant moments, my fantasies of faraway foods, sounds, and human touch. Over and over.

On the third day I noticed that I could feel the air pass into my nostrils, even when I wasn't breathing hard or in any unusual way. I was able to watch that feeling for a couple whole breaths without thinking about other things. But then my back or legs would scream out, or I'd hear F-8 snorting his mucus, or I'd become unbelievably curious about something and open my eyes. Or I would start to nod off. This last one happened a lot—the guru's voice was slow and rhythmic as he trailed off into silence, and I was tired, and I had my eyes closed, and I was trying not to think. "Of Course I'm Going to Fall Asleep!" I shouted.

To myself. Nobly. Silently.

That evening, on the 5-minute walk down to the meditation hall from the men's cabins, I inhaled the cold air into my nostrils. I felt it clearly, sublimely, and I tried doing a walking meditation. It was there, nothing but the breath, and for the first time, I stayed with it continuously. My feet carried me downhill. In and out came the air. There was nothing else. In. Out. My thoughts shut off.

I thought again. My next thought. It was...I'm inside the building, taking off my shoes. I stepped into the hall, walked to F-9, arranged my cushions, and sat down.

"Limit your awareness..." came the guru's voice.

I closed my eyes and went to my "triangular area." The air came. The air went. In. Out. My thoughts shut off. The entire universe shrank, as if I had a telephoto lens, and there was only the area below my nose and above my lips. Minutes went by. I noticed I could hear more acutely. I heard all the sniffing and shifting and repositioning and occasional belching and sneezing. "It's cold," I noticed. The thought came: "People might be getting sick." Suddenly I felt pain in my back like a fire roaring up my spine. "I can't get sick," I thought. "But something's happening here," a different voice said. My body had a third voice. It whispered, cajoled, teased, yearned, screamed, bellowed at me to please, kindly, shift those legs.

I chose to stay put that time. I stayed there. I went and lived in my triangular area. The air came. The air went. Thoughts shut off. After a while I thought, "Wow, my back doesn't hurt very much right now," and the minute the thought came, like a piano dropped from a plane, the pain roared back. "MOVE!" it shrieked. "WHY ARE YOU KILLING YOURSELF?" But I stayed there. I felt the cold drafty air. My head felt cold. "You're going to get sick," my body said.

I stayed put. The universe was my nostrils. I began to feel the heat from the pain in my back spread across my spine. It rode up my neck and behind my ears and over the back of my head. I watched it. With a will of its own, the heat covered my face and burst out the top of my head. The heat pushed through my chest like a demon. I began to sweat profusely. My heartbeat

There is
this difference
between
one who
knows
and one
who practices.

quicken. The need to move increased. My legs were asleep, completely numb, yet I could feel the heat pulse through them and down into my feet and toes. I felt sweat bead on my forehead. I watched the air come and go through my nostrils. In. Out.

The guru broke his silence. He chanted as he always did to signify that the hour meditation was over. For the first time, I hadn't moved for an entire hour.

I stumbled to my feet. An indescribable ecstasy poured through my entire body. The demon was gone. The heat had vanished. I suddenly knew I had just beaten an illness. Something had come into my body, and my focused energy had absorbed it and returned it to the universe.

I remembered at that moment that it normally takes at least a minute or two for my feet, when asleep, to reawaken to blood and sensation. And it's usually painful. This time, the moment I stood up my feet were completely normal, without pain. "Something's happening here." I looked at myself in the bathroom mirror.

The next day, the guru said it was time to extend the kind of focused sensation we had used with the triangular area to the entire body. "Right," I thought sarcastically. "That's impossible." Indeed, just when I was getting somewhere with my triangular area, it was gone. 'Give this a chance.'

TWO DEMONS AND A MONKEY

Those middle days were like some video game in which you have to beat two demons in order to get into a temple to fight a monkey. The two demons on either side of the temple door are: 1. the body's howling discomfort, and 2. the body's gentle sleepiness. When I could slay those two demons, I could get inside for a chance at the Monkey, which is the mind. The mind jumped around, playfully, telling me all kinds of fascinating things, over and over again, in rapid-fire, so that I don't notice that I only have about eight different thoughts.

The Discomfort Demon I found I could vanquish with a kneeling position and an extra cushion. He would still shriek at me and tear apart my back at times, but I realized that my fears of permanent bodily damage were ridiculous; every time I stood up after meditating, the pain was gone within moments. I began to believe what the guru was saying about the relationship between the body and mind.

With the Drowsiness Demon, I stumbled on a nearly perfect solution. Naps. A 20-50 minute delicious nap (inevitably full of vast, fascinating, vivid dreams of every kind of sensual and interactive experience I was otherwise starving for.) After lunch would generally slay the Drowsiness Demon for the remainder of the day.

So I moved into the temple time and again and took on the Monkey Mind. This was the real game, and I had so many wins and losses and ties and cheating no-contests and reinventions of the rules and altogether alternative adventures that it all defies description.

What I can say is that I slowly began to sense my entire body, head to toes, with the perspicacious acuity I had first sensed in my Nostrils. As the days went on, the guru's words led us into every part of the body, and we began to move through our flesh and bones in a sweeping pattern. First the top of the head, the back of the head, the sides, then the temples, then the forehead, the eyebrows, the eyes. "Just observe," he said. "In each part of the body. What is the sensation? Is it a tingling sensation, a sharp sensation, a throbbing sensation? Is it cold, hot, painful, pleasant? Just observe. We are not here to change anything. Just observe." As the hours progressed, I was able to sense more and more subtly. The earlobe. The baby toe. The 'kneepit.' And when my thoughts returned, I could focus as I wished. I began to have new thoughts, thoughts I had never had before.

The food served each day for lunch turned out to be good. Very simple sauteed vegetables in a curry sauce, or Thai tofu noodles, or

vegetarian Mexican fajitas; and then there was always brown rice and white rice and salad. It was served at 11 am. After that, we had only a snack at 5pm -- tea and fruit. But after the first few days I was rarely hungry, even as my senses became so heightened

I occasionally sensed (via smell? telepathy?) what and when we were going to eat before it happened.

On Day 8, my senses took another leap. The guru instructed us to observe intensely our sensations not just when we were meditating, but throughout the day. That night, my snack was half an orange, and I can safely say that eating it was one of the ten most blissful experiences of my life. With open eyes, I gazed at its glorious orange color. I marveled at the patience of a drop of juice hanging on its edge. I peeled the half orange with my fingernails, feeling the soft whiteness of the underside of the rind dig into the tender flesh of my fingertips. I folded the peeled half-orange back on itself, opening it, separating it in two. A squirt of juice shot at my nose and I nearly laughed out loud in delight. I took the first section, awestruck by its perfect size and shape, and I moved it along my lips. I dropped it into my mouth and the first greeting of its sweetness turned my world inside out. I watched my tongue thrill to the fabric of the inner grains of its orange flesh. My tongue pushed it back, onto my molars, which proceeded to sort of grind and rip it apart, freeing more of its sweetness to run back across my tongue. My teeth and tongue went on playing this game for a while, and then my tongue pushed it back, further back, down the throat and into the esophagus, and then it slid into the stomach, which began its own grateful game of rending it further and getting to know in intimate detail every molecule that makes an orange an orange. My fingers tore off the next section.



Before I knew it, it was Day 10. We were about to begin talking as well as mingling and making eye contact and noticing that there was another gender. It seemed impossible. We concluded the morning meditation with a new kind of sitting -- an expansive joyous kind of meditation called metta bhavana that cultivates and spreads compassion and loving kindness. It was profound. The guru spoke of vibrating 'kalapas' -- subatomic particles. He explained that that this is what the universe is (essentially, the Buddha discovered 2500 years ago what today's particle physicists have begun to confirm). The guru instructed us that our meditation in our open bodies could increase the vibrational quality of the space we were in and infuse it with compassion and love for all beings.

And then we were done. The guru's voice was gone. The assistant teachers rose and walked out of the room. Some calm voice came into my mind, a voice that seemed to be the guru's but had a slightly warmer quality. "It's your life to live now. This learning is done for now."

I walked out of the meditation hall in quiet ecstasy. I had long ago thought of the first word I wanted to say, but I was surprised it came to my mind at the precise moment. It was a pristine forest morning, the sun was shining gorgeously, and I looked over into the eyes of the man walking out of the hall beside me. We were strangers, but as we made eye contact I felt I'd known him forever.

"Wow," he said, a grin stretching from ear to ear.

I smiled and spoke. "Rosebud."

A CURE FOR THE COMMON CRAVING

Throughout the week the guru, whose name is Goenkaji (he wasn't physically there with us; we experienced his voice via a variety of video and audio recordings) taught us exhaustively about Buddhism, and his words were full of beauty and wisdom. I loved most of it and had doubts about some of it. I mention some of my thoughts further below, but one of the teachings that resonated like thunder in my mind throughout the week were his words on craving and aversion. These are our primary sources of suffering, he explained, and as I looked over all my relationships and ways of being in life, I saw countless ways this was true.

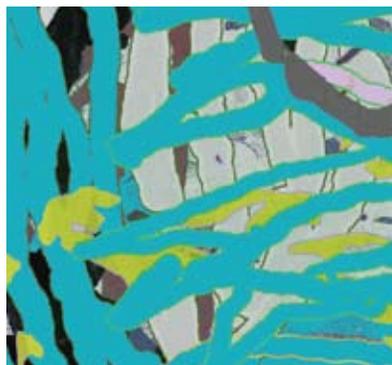
The bliss of Day 10 continued. We spoke with each other and shared insights and questions. Instead of an afternoon nap, I wrote for the first time in ten days. I was overcome with the desire to keep this wisdom fresh and new in my mind as I returned to the world, to keep the teachings about craving and aversion with me in every moment, and also to free myself again to live in a world full of huge sensations of pleasure and pain. So I wrote two poems -- for me to memorize so they might come to mind in the moment I found myself trapped in craving or aversion, pleasure or suffering. One is to remain awake during pleasure, the other to remain awake during suffering.

Here is Pleasure.

May I generate no craving to extend it now or recreate it later,
May I enjoy it deeply,
This is a road I travel only once.

Here is Suffering.

May I have no aversion to it,
May I endure it bravely and patiently,
This is a road I travel only once.



Tony Brasunas is a freelance writer living in San Francisco. His writings have been published in the San Francisco Chronicle, the San Francisco Bay Guardian, and elsewhere. He grew up the son of two vipassana meditators in West Virginia at Claymont, an intentional community dedicated to continuous inner learning.

S.N.Goenka

Goenkaji, as he is known affectionately by many of his students, is a lay teacher of vipassana meditation in the lineage of the late Sayagyi U Ba Khin of Burma (Myanmar). The vipassana technique which S.N.Goenka teaches represents a tradition which can be traced back to King Asoka and to the Buddha.

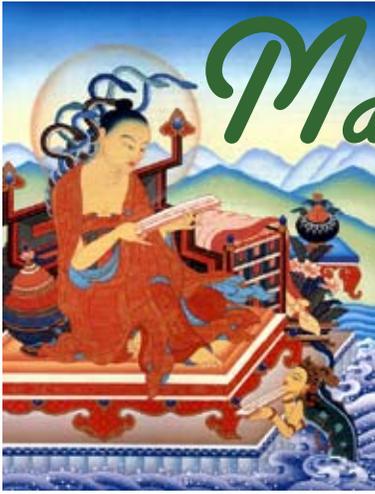
Goenka has taught tens of thousands of people to meditate. Under his guidance, more than 120 residential meditation centers have been established around the world.

Vipassana, meaning the insight of seeing things as they really are, is one of India's most ancient meditation techniques. This style of vipassana meditation is quite possibly the oldest form of vipassana and that which was practiced by the Buddha himself. For more information about courses like this, which are offered at more than 120 residential centers around the world, go to www.dhamma.org.

Below you will find the daily schedule that Tony and his fellow retreatants followed for ten days.

4:00 am	Morning wake-up bell
4:30–6:30 am	Meditate in the hall or in your room
6:30–8:00 am	Breakfast break
8:00–9:00 am	Group meditation in the hall
9:00–11:00 am	Meditate in the hall or in your room according to the teacher's instructions
11:00–12:00 noon	Lunch break
12noon–1:00 pm	Rest and interviews with the teacher
1:00–2:30 pm	Meditate in the hall or in your room
2:30–3:30 pm	Group meditation in the hall
3:30–5:00 pm	Meditate in the hall or in your own room according to the teacher's instructions
5:00–6:00 pm	Tea break
6:00–7:00 pm	Group meditation in the hall
7:00–8:15 pm	Teacher's Discourse in the hall
8:15–9:00 pm	Group meditation in the hall
9:00–9:30 pm	Question time in the hall
9:30 pm	Retire to your own room--Lights out





An Introduction to *Madhyamika Buddhism*

This is the first of three articles on the Madhyamika school of Buddhism, the Mahayana school based on the teachings of "emptiness" and named for its adherence to the "middle way." The school was founded by Nagarjuna in the second century AD and had a profound effect on the development of Buddhism in China and Tibet. This series is reprinted with permission of the Bodhicaryavatara Historical Project, an academic trust first begun by the Mahabodhi Sunyata Seminario of Tarragona, Spain (www.shantideva.net).

The term "Mādhyamika" refers to a school of Buddhism that originated in India about the second century A.D. and continued there through approximately the eleventh century A.D. The influence of Mādhyamika Buddhism is seen throughout Mahāyāna Buddhism. It continued as a recognized school in China and Japan for several centuries after Buddhism first became known in each culture, but eventually the doctrine and style of exposition found in Mādhyamika was absorbed into other schools that have continued down to the present time. In Tibet, the Mādhyamika and Yogacara schools combined to represent the dominant strain of Buddhist religious thought from antiquity to the present. In Zen Buddhism, the spirit of Mādhyamika is seen in the use of koans and the dialogues (mondos) of masters and disciples. The impact of Nāgārjuna's negative dialectic in arguing for the emptiness of an essential nature of things, elements, or factors of existence has been important throughout Buddhist history.

Mādhyamika, sometimes known as the Middle-Path School, was founded by the Indian cleric Nāgārjuna. While there is little historical information about him, Nāgārjuna is often regarded as a much-revered monk whose spiritual insight and power could destroy evil and overcome illusion. He was an astute philosopher who clarified the meaning of the notion of "emptiness" as an expression of the changing phenomena that we humans experience in conventional life.

The earliest available biographical account of Nāgārjuna is by the famous Buddhist translator Kumārajīva, written around 405 A.D. Kumārajīva agrees with other Chinese and Tibetan accounts that Nāgārjuna was born in south India into a family of the Hindu priestly caste. While stories of his boyhood are contradictory, they indicate that he had an exceptional intellectual curiosity and that he eventually underwent a spiritual conversion when he had access to the discussions that were eventually termed "Mahāyāna doctrines".

Nāgārjuna's expression of the Middle Path was not entirely new. A vigorous dialectic to show that all phenomena are empty, and the assertion that there should be no attachment to some preserved essential character of things as they are conventionally perceived and described, was already present in literature that predates Nāgārjuna by a century or two. We find these notions in the Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā) literature and the Ratnakuta collection of sutras. Often Nāgārjuna is regarded as a precursor or an innovator of the forms of Buddhism that began the Mahāyāna tradition. However, key Mahāyāna notions predate Nāgārjuna, and in his two key philosophical treatises it may be better to recognize Nāgārjuna's role as one standing between the Theravada and the Mahāyāna traditions.

While historical information on Nāgārjuna's life is sparse, we can glean something of the philosopher's and ascetic's life from his writings.

His critical analytical verses, his letters, and his hymns indicate a deep concern to practice non-attachment with reference to people, things, or experiences. This expresses his constant effort to perceive the emptiness of all things and hence a detachment from them. In his key treatise, the *Mûla-Mâdhyamika-Kârikâs*, he criticized both Buddhist and Hindu views of existence. In his negative dialectic he was interested to show that there is no eternal reality behind changing forms; even unconditioned nirvâna is not independent of the changing forms of existence. Those beings who have perfected wisdom perceive nirvâna and the changing flux of existence (*samsâra*) as interrelated aspects of the same reality. This insight transforms other moral and spiritual activities such as charity, morality, meditation, and effort. He did not regard his participation in scholarly debates or his explanations of the Buddha's teachings to be inconsistent with religious practice.

The analysis and logical dialectic that Nâgârjuna used is not unrelated to the major efforts made by previous monks to analyze the direct perception of reality in their *abhidharma* analysis, found in the texts of the *Abhidharma-pitaka*. For the *abhidharma* masters, everyday experience was defined and analyzed into classifications of factors or kinds of phenomena (*dharmas*). These factors were defined and commented upon by the monastic scholars in order to release them from the bondage of common, everyday attachments to *things*. The attempt to systematize the phenomenal world and to develop a theory of their interrelationships was for these scholars a distinctly religious goal. The detailed analysis of how each moment of experience arose and dissipated was intended to eliminate

false assumptions about humanity and existence—an intent that was directed toward inner freedom, not speculative thought.

Nâgârjuna addressed this program directly, employing his negative dialectic to challenge the assumption that the classification of factors or the particular elements that compose human experience were any more real than the things people commonly perceive as real.

The goal to perceive how emotional, perceptual, and mental conditions contribute to the human experience of pain or happiness is expressed in the earliest recorded statements of the Buddha. For example, in the *Samyutta-nikâya*, we find Sariputta expressing to the Buddha what understanding the nature of the arising of existence means for the Buddha's path. They have been discussing the meaning of the experience of coming into existence.

'This has come to be,' lord—thus by right insight he sees, as it really is; and seeing it in this way he practices revulsion from it, and that it may fade away and cease. He sees by right insight continual becoming from a certain sustenance, and seeing that in this way as it really is, he practices revulsion from continual becoming from a sustenance, and that it may fade away and cease. From the ceasing of a certain sustenance that which has come to be is liable to cease -- so he sees by right insight as it really is, and seeing that in this way, he practices revulsion from that which is liable to cease, and that it may fade away and cease.

To see for oneself the nature of existence is also expressed by another famous early sutta. It is found in the *Majjhima-nikâya*:

This was said by the Lord: "Whoever sees [dependent co-origination] sees dhamma, whoever sees dhamma sees [dependent co-origination]." The five groups of grasping are generated by conditions. Whatever among these five groups of grasping is desire, sensual pleasure, affection, catching at—that is the uprising of anguish. Whatever among these five groups of grasping is the control of desire and attachment, the ejection of desire and attachment -- that is the stopping of anguish.

In like manner, when we consider the *Mâdhyamika* view and practice of enlightenment we want to understand that this is a religious orientation whose goal is release from suffering, and we want to remain in contact with the concrete religious goal in both the content of *Mâdhyamika* and our procedure for understanding it.

For example, we might profitably recall the *Jâtaka* story about the wandering ascetic.

The future Buddha was sitting talking with the disciples when a wandering ascetic came to debate him. As the ascetic approached, the future Buddha asked: "Will you have a drink of Ganges water, fragrant with the scent of the forest?"

The ascetic replied: "What is the Ganges? Is the sand the Ganges? Is the water the Ganges? Is the hither bank the Ganges? Is the further bank the Ganges?"

But the future Buddha said to him: "If you take exception to the water, the sand, the hither bank, the further bank, where can you find any Ganges River?"

The wandering ascetic was confounded and rose up and went away.

When he was gone, the future Buddha began teaching the assembly that was seated about. He spoke the following stanzas:

What he sees, he does not wish for, But something that he does not see; I think that he will wander long, And what he wishes, not obtain. He is not pleased with what he gets. No sooner gained, it meets his scorn. Insatiable are all wishes! Those who are wish-free, therefore, we adore!

This concern with concrete experience and everyday existence—a concern clearly evident in the teachings of the Buddha—continued in the Mādhyamika understanding of existence. The basic Mādhyamika notions of emptiness, dependent co-origination, and the two-fold truth should be understood in reference to what they mean for releasing human beings from pain.

In understanding the religious meaning of these concepts, we want to try to avoid two extremes in interpretation. (1) The first is that the Mādhyamika orientation to life is simply the product of a certain social-cultural pattern of experience; if it were, then a study of cultural history would be the dominant clue to the meaning of emptiness. (2) The other extreme that we want to avoid is to consider the "content" of emptiness as something external to its realization in the concrete experience of Nāgārjuna during his time and culture, or in the particular cultural experience in which we find ourselves today.

The hope here is that "emptiness" can be understood as a contribution to vital change and transformation in everyday life, including all the limitations and possibilities of

which we are aware. In this sense, spiritual life is seen as integrating the perfection of wisdom with technology, communication, and the economic and political spheres of existence. If we take seriously the claim that things arise in a co-dependent way, then it becomes important to obtain coherent and corroborating experience from as many different sources in our daily lives as possible. Because of this, it is appropriate to appeal to psychological studies, to studies of physics, to history, to social sciences, and to philosophy to uncover the meaning of the emptiness doctrine.

The negative dialectic that we find in Nāgārjuna can be seen as part of a spiritual discipline that helps to release people from their fantasies. If emptiness is true, then it must apply to our own most immediate experience. In later lectures we will examine how the very conditions which constitute the limitations of our experience can be transformed into a new possibility of release. In this way we can begin to understand how the essential problem is not the "elimination" of particular forms, or persons, or historical contexts; rather it is a problem of using the forms found in the particularities of the moment -- of the mountains, the fresh air, of the various sights, of each other -- as being the means whereby we can perceive further than ever before. Thus, the particular form of existence that we experience as "ourselves," living in a modern technological society, being the particular men and women that we are, having the kind of intellectual training or lack of it that we have -- none of these are in themselves the particular problem.

The basic problem will be something like the wandering ascetic who could not accept a glass of Ganges

River water without getting into a debate which bound him further to his thirst. What we want to see is that every conscious experience is an interpretation of oneself in an environment, whether we are aware of it or not aware of it. There is indeed a historical and cultural character, a biological and neurological conditioning process, pervading every human experience, even the most profound religious awareness. In that context, which is the reflective apprehension of the dependent co-origination of things, we can begin to grasp several ways of becoming aware that all things are empty.

(1) THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL

The first general area of our discussion will be the question of how we can know anything. Here we will try to understand that the very words that we use to communicate knowledge or emotions are both vehicles for engaging with each other and limitations for such an engagement.

(2) THE PSYCHOLOGICAL

Human beings have an enormous potential for enhanced living. They can gain access to new capacities and develop or re-develop old ones by releasing themselves from habits of perception and sensitivities. A major aspect of the Buddhist understanding of the human being -- whether it is from the suttas, from the abhidharma, from Mādhyamika, or later developments -- is that there are various processes of consciousness; there is a recognition that an expanded attitude is necessary in order to be released from the habits and limitations of experience. The actualization of an expanded attitude means that one can be psychologically de-habitized, de-programmed, de-conditioned, non-automatized. Openness to new experiences allows for access to

unused capacities; and we must remember that unused capacities are seen within the Buddhist context to be self-imposed restrictions. Such an openness requires the development of experiential skills that open inner doors and gateways to new vistas, that build bridges and runways into spaces that were previously inaccessible due to fear or ignorance.

(3) THE ETHICAL

The third general area that we will explore is the practical, social and inter-personal dimension of our daily lives. If emptiness has any significance to us it will also pertain to social and institutional forms that seem to be so coercive in their impact. This includes education, the institutions of law and justice, government, family life, and economic processes.

(4) THE ONTOLOGICAL

The fourth area is the understanding of emptiness as an expression of the nature of existence. This is sometimes called ontology, the study of the way things really are. The notion of dependent co-origination can be seen to correlate with a number of recent studies in physics as well as studies in perception that are followed by the natural and social scientific communities. If we perceive the world not as a pile of building blocks or as little entities laid upon each other, causing each other to change particular form, we will get a new vision of the very existence we live in. It will mean that the basic concept of reality will be "co-dependent relationships," "energies in tension," "systems of experience," "matrices of interacting energy."

The attempt to understand Mādhyamika as a religious expression is something that is automatically "self-involving". This means that the historical expression, the concepts, the ideas, the discussions about the meaning of various terms, are more than just guides for knowing what somebody else once thought or used as a basis for life. What we need to see is the possibility that these concerns involve us as individuals, as a community and society. This is true of all religious phenomena. In the very constitution of our

existence, these forms attempt to reflect the most profound and hidden reality in which we participate. Engagement with these sorts of things is powerful, for it can radically alter one's own life. It is both dangerous and potentially enhancing.

When we can engage ideas or concepts as religious phenomena, we are dealing with the basic matrix of assumptions that people have for meaning. This matrix of axioms, concerns, and processes of awareness make specific questions of value, of self-identity, and of meaning possible. To deal with the content of religious experience is something like dealing with the notion of "color". If we view "color" simply as a word that is in a dictionary and then relate it to other words, we will not realize that the reality of color is a mode of perception that is presupposed by our visual experience. As such a mode of awareness, it is the very basis for experiencing specific colors rather than an item discovered within a vocabulary. Some terms stimulate a profound awareness about the nature of experience, other terms indicate something which is an inference from our experience. All this talk, however, about a concept or series of concepts should not divert our attention from the fact that throughout the four areas of our discussion, we are going to probe different processes of awareness as fundamental conditioning factors for how human beings participate in the arising of their own experience and existence.

In summary, a person who understands religious life in terms of its power to transform life will be concerned both with the specific cultural forms and with what is true or real in one's own life. The ultimate dimension of religious experience refers to the reality in which all things, including ourselves, participate. We are aware of that ultimate dimension when we live within an extraordinarily deep sensitivity to life or formulate a profound strategy for our actions. Such a process of deciding what is real and what is significant for us is central to the approach we will take to understand the formulation and meaning of Mādhyamika Buddhism.

If
emptiness
is true,
then it
must apply
to our
own most
immediate
experience.



The Four Noble Truths in their Three Aspects

by Ajahn Sumedho

There are three aspects to each of the four noble truths, as we learn in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, the *Setting the Wheel of Dharma in Motion Sutra*, the first sutra spoken by the Buddha after his awakening. Recognizing these, then developing a deep understanding of them and finally penetrating them fully is an essential practice for many Buddhists, especially in the Theravada tradition.

THE FIRST ASPECT

For the First Noble Truth, ‘There is suffering’ is the first insight. What is that insight? We don’t need to make it into anything grand; it is just the recognition: ‘There is suffering’. That is a basic insight. The ignorant person says, ‘I’m suffering. I don’t want to suffer. I meditate and I go on retreats to get out of suffering, but I’m still suffering and I don’t want to suffer... How can I get out of suffering? What can I do to get rid of it?’ But that is not the First Noble Truth; it is not: ‘I am suffering and I want to end it.’ The insight is, ‘There is suffering’.

Now you are looking at the pain or the anguish you feel—not from the perspective of ‘It’s mine’ but as a reflection: ‘There is this suffering, this dukkha’. It is coming from the reflective position of ‘Buddha seeing the Dhamma.’ The insight is simply the acknowledgment that there is this suffering without making it personal. That acknowledgment is an important insight; just looking at mental anguish or physical pain and seeing it as dukkha rather than as personal misery—just seeing it as dukkha and not reacting to it in a habitual way.

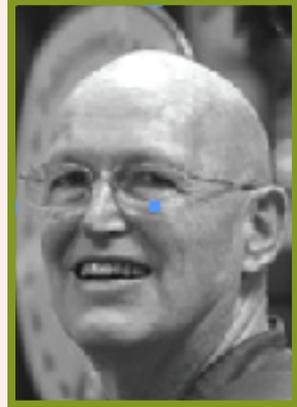
THE SECOND ASPECT

The second insight of the First Noble Truth is ‘Suffering should be understood.’ The second insight or aspect of each of the Noble Truths has the word ‘should’ in it: ‘It should be understood.’ The second insight then, is that dukkha is something to understand. One should understand dukkha, not just try to get rid of it.

We can look at the word ‘understanding’ as ‘standing under’. It is a common enough word but, in Pali, ‘understanding’ means to really accept the suffering, stand under or embrace it rather than just react to it.

With any form of suffering—physical or mental—we usually just react, but with understanding we can really look at suffering; really accept it, really hold it and embrace it. So that is the second aspect, ‘We should understand suffering’.

*There is the statement, then the prescription,
and then the result of having practised.*



THE THIRD ASPECT

The third aspect of the First Noble Truth is: 'Suffering has been understood.' When you have actually practised with suffering—looking at it, accepting it, knowing it and letting it be the way it is—then there is the third aspect: 'Suffering has been understood', or 'Dukkha has been understood.' So these are the three aspects of the First Noble Truth: 'There is dukkha'; 'It is to be understood'; and, 'It has been understood.'

This is the pattern for the three aspects of each noble truth. There is the statement, then the prescription and then the result of having practised. One can also see it in terms of the Pali words *pariyatti*, *patipatti* and *pativedha*. *Pariyatti* is the theory or the statement, 'There is suffering.' *Patipatti* is the practice - actually practising with it; and *pativedha* is the result of the practice. This is what we call a reflective pattern; you are actually developing your mind in a very reflective way.

A Buddha mind is a reflective mind that knows things as they are.

Luang Por Sumedho was born in Seattle, Washington. In 1966, he went to Thailand to practice meditation. He remained in Thailand as a disciple of the Ajahn Chah until 1977 when he took up residence in England, eventually establishing Amaravati Buddhist Monastery there where he now practices.

The Story of Layman Pang

Layman Pang was a celebrated lay Buddhist in the Chan tradition. Much like Vimalakirti, who is said to have lived around the time of the Buddha (Siddhārtha Gautama) in the 6th to 4th centuries BCE, Layman Pang is considered a model of the potential of the non-monastic Buddhist follower.

Sometimes ordinary folks get the idea that the meaning of Chan is so profound that only men and women who've been ordained in the dharma can possibly fathom it. But that's just not so. Actually, we priests often feel that we're in way over our heads. And every now and then, while we splash about, trying to look good treading water in our nice uniforms, along comes a civilian who zips by us, swimming like an Olympic champion. Such a civilian was Layman Pang, He would have won Chan's gold medal. He's been a hero not only to centuries worth of other laymen, but also, I confess, to every priest who's ever studied his winning style.

Layman Pang lived during the latter half of the eighth century, a golden age for Chan. He was an educated family man with a wife, son and daughter, and he was well enough off financially to be able to devote his time to Buddhist studies.

He got the idea that a person needed solitude in order to meditate and ponder the dharma, so he built himself a little one-room monastery near his family home. Every day he went there to study and practice.

His wife, son and daughter studied the dharma, too, but they stayed in the family house, conducting their business and

doing their chores, incorporating Buddhism into their daily lives.

Layman Pang had submerged himself in the sutras and one day he found that he, too, was in over his head. He hadn't learned to swim yet. On that day, he stormed out of his monastery-hut and, in abject frustration complained to his wife, "Difficult! Difficult!"

Difficult! Trying to grasp so many facts is like trying to store sesame seeds in the leaves of a tree top!"

His wife retorted, "Easy! Easy! Easy! You've been studying words, but I study the grass and find the Buddha self reflected in every drop of dew."

Now, Layman Pang's daughter, Ling Zhao, was listening to this verbal splashing, so she went swimming by. "Two old people foolishly chattering!" she called.

"Just a minute!" shouted Layman Pang. "If you're so smart, tell us your method."

Ling Zhao returned to her parents and said gently, "It's not difficult, and it's not easy. When I'm hungry, I eat. When I'm tired, I sleep."

Ling Zhao had mastered natural Chan.

Layman Pang learned a lot that day. He understood so much that he put away his books, locked his little monastery-hut, and decided to visit different Chan masters to test his understanding. He still couldn't compete against his own daughter, but he was getting pretty good.

Eventually he wound up at Nan Yueh Mountain where Master Shi Tou was leading a monastic retreat. Layman Pang went directly to the master and asked, "Where can I find a man who's unattached to material things?" Master Shi Tou slowly raised his hand and closed Pang's mouth. In that one gesture, Pang's Chan really deepened. He stayed at Nan Yueh for many months.

All the monks there watched him and became quite curious about his natural Chan, his perfect equanimity. Even Master Shi Tou was moved to ask him what his secret was. "Everyone marvels at your methods," said Shi Tou. "Tell me. Do you have any special powers?"

Layman Pang just smiled and said, "No, no special powers. My day is filled with humble activities and I just keep my mind in harmony with my tasks. I accept what comes without desire or aversion. When encountering other people, I maintain an

uncritical attitude, never admiring, never condemning. To me, red is red and not crimson or scarlet. So, what marvelous method do I use? Well, when I chop wood, I chop wood; and when I carry water, I carry water."

Master Shi Tou was understandably impressed by this response. He wanted Pang to join his Sangha. "A fellow like you shouldn't remain a layman," said Shi Tou. "Why don't you shave your head and become a monk?"

The proposition signaled the end of Pang's sojourn with Shi Tou. Clearly, he could learn no more from this master. Pang responded with a simple remark. "I'll do what I'll do," and what he did was leave.

He next showed up at the doorstep of the formidable Master Ma Zu. Again he asked the master, "Where can I find a man who's unattached to material things?" Ma Tzu frowned and replied, "I'll tell you after you've swallowed the West River in one gulp."

In grasping that one remark, Pang was able to complete his enlightenment. He saw that 'uncritical mind' was not enough. His mind had to become as immense as Buddha-mind; it had to encompass all samsara and nirvana, to expand into infinity's void. Such a mind could swallow the Pacific.

Layman Pang stayed with Master Ma Zu until he discovered one day that he had no more to learn from him either. On that particular occasion, Pang approached Ma Zu and, standing over him, said, "An enlightened fellow asks you to look up;" Ma Zu deliberately looked straight down. Layman Pang sighed, "How beautifully you play the stringless lute!"

At this point, Ma Zu had confirmed that there was no difference between human beings, that they were truly one and the same individual. As Pang had looked down, Ma Zu would look down. There was no one else to look up. But then, unaccountably, Ma Zu looked straight up and broke the spell, so to speak. So Layman Pang bowed low and remained in that obeisance of finality as Ma Zu rose and began to walk away. As the Master brushed past him, the Layman whispered, "Bungled it, didn't you...trying to be clever."

Layman Pang had attained mastery and every master he encountered acknowledged this. But what is evident to a master is not always evident to an ordinary monk. One winter day, while Pang was leaving the monastery of Master Yao Shan, some young monks, who were disdainful of his status as a mere layman, accompanied him to the front door. When Pang looked outside, he saw that it was snowing. "Good snow!" he said. "The flakes do not fall elsewhere." A monk named Quan, who was as impudent as he was stupid, completely missed the wit in Pang's remark. He mocked the Layman, asking sarcastically, "Where did you expect the flakes to fall?"

Now, Pang was goodnaturedly complimenting the snow for not falling in the kitchen or the meditation hall, that is to say, for falling where snow was supposed to fall—in the courtyard and

fields, on the trees and roads. Pang knew that he would have to walk a long distance in that bitterly cold snow, and he had accepted that fact without distress.

But Pang not only had the wisdom of a master, he had the temper, too. When he saw the sneer on the young monk's face, he struck him.

"How dare you!" said the monk "And you're an ordained monk?" asked Pang incredulously. "Why, you'd be rejected at Hell's gates!"

"Just what do you mean by that?" demanded the monk.

Pang struck him again. "I mean that though you have eyes, ears and tongue, you're absolutely blind, deaf, and dumb." Then he calmly went out into the snow as if it were just so much sunshine. He had given the monk quite a lesson. But usually he was extremely kind and patient with those he instructed.

One day, as he listened to a man who was trying to explain *The Diamond Sutra*, he noticed that the fellow was struggling with the meaning of a line that dealt with the nonexistence of the ego personality. "Perhaps I can help you," Pang said. "Do you understand that that which is conditional and changing is not real and that which is unconditional and immutable is real?"

"Yes," replied the commentator.

"Then is it not true that egos are conditional and changing, that no ego is the same from one minute to the next? Is it not true that with each passing minute, depending on circumstances and conditions, we acquire new information and new experiences just as we forget old information and experiences?"

"Yes," added the commentator.

"But what is there about us that is unconditional and unchanging?" asked Pang.

"Our common Buddha-nature!" replied the commentator, suddenly smiling, suddenly understanding. "That alone is real! The rest is mere illusion!" He was so happy that he inspired Pang to write him a poem:

**Since there is neither ego nor
personality,
Who is distant and who is close?
Take my advice and
quit talking about reality.
Experience it directly, for yourself.
The nature of the Diamond wisdom
Is truth in all its singular purity.
Fictitious egos can't divide or soil it
The expressions,
'I hear,' 'I believe,' 'I understand,'
Are simply expedient expressions,
Tools in the diamond-cutter's hands.
When the work's done,
he puts them down.**

Layman Pang and his daughter Ling Zhao traveled around China meeting their expenses by selling bamboo articles they made. They grew old together, becoming legends of enlightenment. Their last residence was a mountain cave.

Pang knew that it was time for him to lay his burden down. He was very tired and could not go on. Inside the cave there was one particular rock that he always sat on when meditating; so he took his seat and, intending to pass away when the sun was directly overhead, he sent Ling Zhao outside to watch for the moment that noon

had come. In a few minutes, however, Ling Zhao returned to the cave breathless with excitement "Oh Father," she shouted, "you must come outside and see this! There's been an eclipse of the sun!"

Well, this was an extraordinary occurrence if ever there was one. Pang could not resist having a look at it. So he rose from his meditation rock and went outside. He looked and looked but there was no eclipse. Noon had come, that was all. But where was Ling Zhao?

Pang returned to the cave and found her dead, her body sitting upright on his meditation rock. "Oh, that girl!" cried Pang. "She always was ahead of me."

He buried her and then, a week later he too entered nirvana. His body was cremated and the ashes scattered on the waters of a nearby lake.

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Om Mani Padme Hum

Its Many Meanings At A Glance

The mantra *om mani padme hum* is sometimes given fanciful or mysterious translations, and sometimes said to be untranslatable. However, it is simply one of the names for Chenrezig, placed between the two sacred and traditional syllables, *om* and *hum*. Chenrezig is Tibet's bodhisattva of compassion, whose name is Guan Yin in Chinese, Kannon in Japanese, and Avalokiteshvara in Sanskrit. The mantra is generally chanted to invoke compassion.

AS THE NAME OF CHENREZIG

OM represents the body of all Buddhas; it often begins mantras

MANI means "jewel" in Sanskrit

PADME means "lotus" in Tibetan

HUM represents the mind of all Buddhas; it often ends mantras

MANI refers to the jewel that Chenrezig holds in his two central hands

PADME is the lotus he holds in his second left hand

Saying **OM MANI PADME HUM** names Chenrezig through his attributes: "the one who holds the jewel and the lotus." Chenrezig and Jewel Lotus are two names for the bodhisattva.

AS THE CLOSER OF THE DOOR TO REBIRTH

Each syllable represents closing the door to rebirths in one of the six realms of cyclic existence:

OM closes the door to rebirths in the world of the gods (devas)

MA closes the door to rebirths in the world of demigods (asuras)

NI closes the door to rebirths in the human realm

PAD closes the door to rebirths in the animal realm

ME closes the door to rebirths in the world of hungry ghosts (pretas)

HUM closes the door to rebirths in the hell worlds

AS A PURIFIER

Each syllable has a purifying effect:

OM purifies the veils of body

MA purifies the veils of speech

NI purifies the veils of mind

PAD purifies the veils of conflicting emotions

ME purifies the veils of latent conditioning

HUM purifies the veil that covers knowledge

AS A PRAYER

Each syllable is a prayer in itself:

OM is a prayer addressed to the body of the Buddhas

MA is a prayer addressed to the speech of the Buddhas

NI is a prayer addressed to the mind of the Buddhas

PAD is a prayer addressed to the qualities of the Buddhas

ME is a prayer addressed to the activity of the Buddhas

HUM gathers the grace of the body, speech, mind, and qualities of the Buddhas

AS THE SIX PARAMITAS

The six syllables correspond to the six paramitas:

OM represents generosity

MA represents ethics

NI represents patience

PAD represents diligence

ME represents concentration

HUM represents wisdom

AS BUDDHAS

The six syllables correspond to the six Buddhas reigning over the six Buddha families:

OM corresponds to Ratnasambhava

MA corresponds to Amoghasiddhi

NI corresponds to Vajradhara

PAD corresponds to Vairocana

ME corresponds to Amitabha

HUM corresponds to Akshobya

AS COLORS

The colors that correspond to each syllable are:

OM corresponds to white

MA corresponds to green

NI corresponds to yellow

PAD corresponds to blue

ME corresponds to red

HUM corresponds to black

AS THE SIX WISDOMS

Each syllable stands for one of the six wisdoms:

OM stands for the wisdom of equanimity

MA stands for the wisdom of activity

NI stands for the the wisdom born of itself

PAD stands for the the wisdom of dharmadhatu

ME stands for the discriminating wisdom

HUM stands for the mirror-like wisdom



Smarten up! Meditate!

—Zen Master and Poet Philip Whalen's
take on the Buddha's last words



No matter how late, no matter how drunk,
get up and do it [meditate].
—the infamous drag queen- turned-roshi, Issan
Dorsey on morning meditation

“Neither from itself nor from another,
Nor from both,
Nor without a cause,
Does anything whatever, anywhere arise.”
—Nagarjuna, founder of the Madhyamika school of
Buddhism 2nd century AD



Life is not an identity; it is a becoming.

—Anonymous



"What is the mind? It is a phenomenon that is not
body, not substantial, has no form, no shape, no
color, but, like a mirror, can clearly reflect objects."

—Lama Zopa Rinpoche



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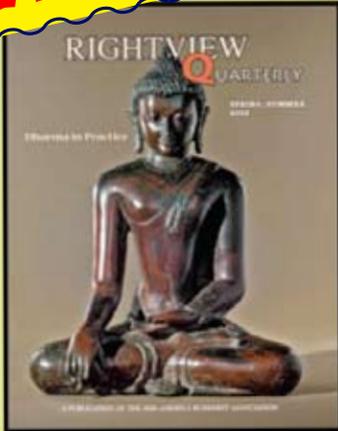


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There are many ways to practice the Buddha's teachings. There are many ways to meditate. The Buddha will be

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When everything else is right: right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right recollection, right concentration — the whole *eightfold path*. When there is right view, everything else falls into place naturally." —Ajahn Chah



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Ko Un

ORIGINAL TRANSLATIONS