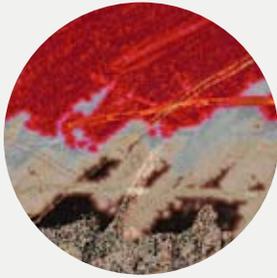


RIGHTVIEW QUARTERLY



DHARMA IN PRACTICE VOLUME ONE, NUMBER 4

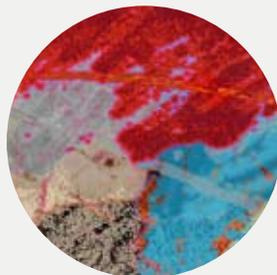
Master Ji Ru, Editor-in-Chief
Xianyang Carl Jerome, Editor
Carol Corey, Layout and Artwork
Will Holcomb, Production Assistance
Xian Huan Hillary Isaacs, Copy Editor



Subscribe at no cost at
www.maba-usa.org
or by filling out the form on the back page

We welcome letters and comments.
Write to:
rightview@maba-usa.org
or the address below

RIGHTVIEW QUARTERLY is published at
no cost to the subscriber by the
Mid-America Buddhist Association (MABA)
299 Heger Lane
Augusta, Missouri 63332-1445 USA



The authors of their respective
articles retain all copyrights.

More artwork by Carol Corey may be seen at
www.visualzen.net

VISIT www.RightviewOnline.org

A traditional-style sacred drawing of Tilopa is pictured on the cover. (See article on page 36.)
The image may be downloaded for free at www.namsebangdzo.com/category_s/1304.htm

EDITOR'S PAGE



by Xianyang Carl Jerome

JOIN US ON THE WEB AT RightviewOnline.org MABA'S INTERACTIVE BUDDHIST LEARNING CENTER: A NEW IDEA IN DISTANCE DHARMA LEARNING

Xianyang Carl Jerome has been practicing Buddhism for the past ten years. His first Teacher was Zen Master Zenshin Philip Whalen in San Francisco. For the past five years, Carl has been a student of Master Ji Ru at the Mid-America Buddhist Association (MABA) and the International Buddhism Friendship Association (IBFA), where Carl has taught meditation and Buddhism classes and has led retreats. He maintains an inside-out practice, teaching Buddhism and meditation and leading 3-day retreats in Missouri prisons. In 2006 Master Ji Ru granted him Lay Teaching Endorsement. Carl is the editor of Rightview Quarterly magazine and editor and founding teacher of RightviewOnline.org. He resides at MABA, his home monastery, just outside St. Louis, MO, with frequent jaunts to IBFA, the monastery's sister temple in Chicago's Chinatown.

Rightview Quarterly is expanding, thanks to the kindness and support of our community and Sangha. In addition to the magazine, you will soon be able to pursue your practice at RightviewOnline.org, a new kind of distance Dharma learning site on the web.

In 2002, with the encouragement of our Abbot, Master Ji Ru, MABA (The Mid-America Buddhist Association in Augusta, MO) started a simple four-page black-and-white newsletter so that its Dharma teachings could be spread beyond the woodlands of the monastery to its members and supporters who were unable to attend teachings in person. In 2005, the newsletter morphed into this magazine, Rightview Quarterly, thanks to the dana of our supporters and the support of our monastic friends around the country and around the world. As we come to the end of the first year of publication, conditions have arisen from the magazine to suggest that it be expanded online to further its aim of spreading the Dharma. As a result, RightviewOnline.org is being initiated.

What Is Rightview Online?

RightviewOnline.org will be an interactive Buddhist teaching site and online study center dedicated to Dharma in Practice. It will serve as a companion and adjunct to Rightview Quarterly magazine. Our aim is to establish interactive distance learning opportunities for those considering or already following the Buddhist Path.

In addition, Rightview Online will provide an opportunity for those who wish to establish a one-on-one Student-Teacher relationship with a member of our Sangha Online.

About Our Practice Online

In the coming months, we invite you to explore the site and avail yourself of its many learning opportunities. There will be Sutra Studies and Buddhist Ethics Studies. There will be a Core Teachings Center, which will include writings, videos and podcasts. There will be an Online Bookshelf, which will include an annotated list of Dharma books specifically recommended and categorized by our Sangha Online to facilitate learning the Dharma. There will be a Practice Center, as well as Rightview Quarterly Magazine Archives, Learning Links, FAQ's, and more as we move through time and space together.

It is because of the vision of Master Ji Ru and the dedication, generosity and virtue of his students and disciples that all this is possible. Several in our community have been deeply involved in this process and to them—to Carol Corey, to HerKait Seet, and to Will Holcomb in St. Louis; to Mr. Au and Mr. Lin in New York, we owe an especially deep bow of gratitude. We are indebted to our readers and contributors, to our translators, to our software tactical volunteers and to our proofers, to our Sangha at MABA and IBFA, and to all beings everywhere for the success of our Dharma endeavors.

*May the merit of our practice
and teachings,
in person, in print, and on line,
benefit all beings
past, present, and future.
May our endeavors shine the light of
the Teachings brightly into the darkness
around us so that all beings
may find their way to liberation.*



CONTENTS

- 4 Dharma in Practice:** What Meditation Brings to Our Life
Master Ji Ru
- 6 Inside Out Practice:** The Pajama Room
James Hicklin
- 10 Buddhist Justice:** Second in a series on Buddhist Ethics
Xianyang Carl Jerome
- 13 Offerings**
- 14 Translations:** Applying the Dharma to Studying Buddhism
Venerable Yin Shun Fashi
- 24 My Buddhism**
Robert Granat
- 28 The Ant who Felled the Giant Tree:** Reflections on Karma
Don Sloane
- 32 Begin By Understanding Yourself**
Venerable Master Jen-Chun
- 34 5 Versions of the 5 Contemplations**
- 36 Life of Tilopa**
Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche
- 39 Walking meditation:** A Pragmatic Approach
Venerable Sujiva
- 45 From Our Bookshelves:** Adventures With the Buddha
Reviewed by Xianyang Carl Jerome
- 49 Dharma in the Moment**

dharma in practice



WHAT MEDITATION BRINGS TO OUR LIFE

by MASTER JI RU

Let me start by recounting two early teachings of the Buddha from the Pali Canon which will help us to understand why we practice meditation:

THERE IS ONE STORY ABOUT A YOUNG MONASTIC WHO SERVED AS AN ATTENDANT TO THE ELDER MONK. THE YOUNG MONK ALWAYS LISTENED TO THE PROFOUND TEACHINGS OF THE MASTER. AS HE LEARNED THE DHARMA, HE ACHIEVED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF BODY AND MIND.

IN ANOTHER TEACHING, THE BUDDHA SAYS THAT A BHIKKHU SHOULD PRACTICE ANAPANASATI (MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING). IF A BHIKKHU PRACTICES REPEATEDLY, THE BUDDHA EXPLAINED, HE WILL GAIN CESSATION OF THE BODY AND MIND, LEADING TO AN AWAKENED EXISTENCE, A PURE MIND COMPLETELY DONE.

In these two stories we see some of the important reasons why we practice meditation in Chan Buddhism: to develop (1) righteousness of the body and mind—which is the opposite of seeing, acting and thinking in unwholesome or evil ways; and (2) to achieve the cessation of body and mind—in other words, liberation.

What does meditation practice bring to our life? First, by disciplining of our thoughts, meditation allows us to contemplate and observe, which leads directly to attaining Right Concentration; second, with mindful breathing, through meditation we can take control of our bodies, and in so doing we can achieve a steady joyfulness and state of physical balance.

This benefits us as practitioners by helping us avoid an immoderate body and mind, which would otherwise lead us to all kinds of trouble, both now and in the future. Through meditation we learn to follow a moderate and restrained path, which leads us to liberation, to a life based on the Eightfold Noble Path.

Through meditation we are able to attain moderation and simplicity of living, and also righteousness of body and mind, as well as the cessation of the body and mind.

Let me discuss cessation of the body and mind. Cessation means stopping. When we practice meditation, we concentrate on the sitting, walking, lying or standing postures. Especially when we sit on the cushion, the body stops its overt movement. However, the movement of the mind continues, because of external and internal stimulation.

Externally, our five senses (sound, smell, taste, bodily sensations, and so on) are in contact with worldly phenomena. This sensory contact disturbs the mind. Internally, all kinds of concepts and pictures pop up to distract the mind. With meditation practice the mind is trained to focus on a simple object so as to avoid all disturbances, both externally from the senses, and internally from the conceptual mind. That is why we say that this method is the way to achieve the cessation of body and mind, or, said in another way, to stop the activity of body and mind. This method is called avoiding the five sense desires, all of which disturb concentration.

In ordinary daily life one's mind is not disciplined. Without training, over time, the mind becomes uncontrollable. This is sometimes called having a "monkey mind," and results in mental and physical stress which can adversely affect our immune system and overall health.

With an untrained mind in a disturbed state, we feel upset, in a state of emotional turmoil. Our mind-state reacts to situations with narrowness, stubbornness, and self-conceit. In the Dharma, we call this state the defilement of the self-centered. Life itself becomes very difficult. However, in cultivating a broad-minded view and cultivating compassion, life becomes easier. Through meditation we can regain control over our mind and develop a peaceful life based on compassion and wisdom, with Right View and Right Understanding leading to liberation.

When the mind is trained to become pure, then it actually is the normal mind--frank and upright, without twists and knots. But in today's materialistic mind-state, we are always thinking a lot, ruminating and worrying. Our mind-state becomes tired, restless, conflicted and confused. As a result, many of our pains and sufferings are increased.

Meditation is our practice for addressing those pains and sufferings, for moving us toward an easier, calmer, more peaceful and harmonious life.

Master Ji Ru is Abbot of the Mid-America Buddhist Association (MABA), located just outside St. Louis, Missouri, and the International Buddhism Friendship, located in Chicago's Chinatown. Bhikkhu Ji Ru received higher ordination as a Thai Theravada monk in 1980, and again as a Ch'an Rinzai monk in 1986. He has been Abbot of Chuang Yen monastery in New York state and the Temple of Enlightenment in New York City. He is an internationally respected Buddhist Teacher and author who regularly teaches to lay and monastic audiences throughout the United States and Asia. He recently began a two-year solitary retreat.



Inside out Practice

JAMES HICKLIN

THE PAJAMA ROOM

I recall the day that religion died for me. It was the day spirituality was born. I was 12 years old at the time, standing in The Pajama Room, contemplating life.

**On the day
I first
considered the
Four Noble
Truths,
on that day
I figured out
I could
be fixed.**

The Pajama Room. That's what my sister called the disciplinary room at the rehab center. It got its name from the paper hospital clothes they made you wear, complete with matching blue booties.

So there I stood, with nothing to do but contemplate how much I hated life. I wasn't particularly introspective. There was simply nothing else to do. There were no personal effects in The Pajama Room. Identity was a luxury there, hard to find in the white metal walls, hospital tiled floors, and the gymnastics mat meant to function as a bed.

There was, however, a window. A picture-window size, quite large. Of course, it was reinforced with steel frames and security mesh that ran through the glass itself. (Can't have people breaking free from their misery, now can we?)

Looking out the window was like looking onto the landscape of my life. There was a little tree, fragile and lifeless, standing outside the window. It was wintertime, just after Christmas. The grass was dead, as though it was showing its sympathy for the dead tree by joining in the lifelessness. The sky was bleak, as though the sun would never shine again. I spent many hours looking out that window, wondering how I'd gotten there and where I'd go next, wondering if the security mesh of life would keep me from freedom.

There, in the midst of my brooding and anger, it happened. I should have seen it, but I didn't. Nor did I realize what had happened until long after the fact. While I sat, full of remorse in the Pajama Room, God died. Not the great-big-ol'-father-figure-in-the-sky God, though he was part of the equation; but God, anyone-or-anything-outside-of-myself that could fix me.

I had finally come to accept what everyone had been telling me for so long. I was broken. Not just a kid who acted "bad" every now and again. I was completely broken, worthless.

I guess I had thought about it long before that day. I just hadn't accepted it. Until then I'd always thought that someone would save me from myself. I had always thought some great, merciful angel would come into my life and make everything better. In the Pajama Room I stopped believing. I stopped believing in angels and demons, gods and goddesses. I stopped believing in any supernatural being that was going to bring me to salvation.

Don't get me wrong. It was not that I'd stopped believing in the existence of such things. I had quite a long history of churchification, occultism, and everything else in between. I'd pled to every kind of being I had read about in my short 12 years of life: "Please, please stop the suffering that is my life." No, I hadn't stopped believing in their existence. I just knew none of them were going to swoop in and fix me. Not then, not ever.

There in The Pajama Room I'd finally come to accept the fact that even if such beings existed,

they just didn't care. God was no savior, no matter what form he or she took. I smile now, recalling my eulogy to God.

When I got out of The Pajama Room, I returned to my room. I stood in the bathroom, clutching the disposable razor I'd convinced the orderly I needed for my three chin hairs. I pried the blade free of its plastic encasement. I placed it next to the pen I'd set on the sink. I removed my shirt

and stared down at my hairless chest. Without much thought, I picked up the razor and began to carve a Sign of David into my chest. The cuts weren't very deep; it was a disposable razor, after all. They were deep enough though, to bring a bright red bleeding star to my chest. I set the blade down and picked up the pen. I didn't know there was a difference between tattoo ink and disposable pen ink. I pried off the top of the pen and began smearing ink into my wound. I wanted

this star to remain on my chest, as a sign to the world that yes, I was broken, and would never again forget that, for me, all hope was lost. At twelve years of age, this act said all that.

Well, the star only lasted for a week or so. But I believe it saved my life. Had I not found the inner strength to make that mark of defiance, I might have given in to the overwhelming sadness and ended it all. I wanted to die back then and spent many hours trying to figure out how to do it painlessly. My mark, my stand against the suffering of life, somehow kept me going.



AS WITH ALL
BIRTH,
IT BEGAN
WITH BLOOD
AND
ENDED
WITH TEARS.



Now in retrospect, what's more interesting to me, is what was born in me that day. As with all birth, it began with blood and ended with tears. Mine was a long delivery. The blood came when I was 12, the tears at 20, when sitting in my prison cell, finally convinced that what I had first believed all those years ago was true. Not only did everyone tell me I was broken, in my prison cell (in administrative segregation—solitary confinement—for disciplinary reasons) I had proven it. They were all correct. I was broken and there was no one to fix me, and no hope at all.

So why did I start this by saying that the day religion died in me, spirituality was born? Religion is a process of looking to the world outside of yourself for assistance. Religion is looking for the world around you to fix you. At the young age of 12, I gave up on that. I gave up on the idea that the world would ever fix me.

At that time I didn't think I could be fixed, so I can't say that spirituality was fully formed in me then, but the process was begun. The seed had been planted. On the day I first considered the Four Noble Truths, there in my administrative segregation cell—the pajama room of my current residence—on that day, I knew I could be fixed. I could do it myself. That's when spirituality was born in me.

Maybe that sounds egotistical. You don't know me, and don't know that in my mind I'm still broken. In my world, my mind, there are more things wrong than right. I made it that way. So not knowing these things, it could seem fair to cry foul. I am, in fact, a long way from being fixed. I have a mountain of shame which every now and then grows oppressively high. And just in case I ever forget "broken," just in case I might start to think I'm alright...I just have to look around, look at "where I live," and I remember how I got here. I can never take that back. It will never go away.

So, when I say I am the only one who can fix me, it isn't some grandiose idea of how well suited I am to the task. Lord knows, if this were an interview to decide who was most suited to the job, I'd be the last one I'd hire to fix me. Unfortunately, there's no one else who will do it. No one else who can do it.

**MY MARK,
MY STAND
AGAINST
THE
SUFFERING
OF LIFE,
SOMEHOW
KEPT ME
GOING.**

Which brings me to the point. It is often the case that we as American Buddhists come to Buddhism not as Buddhist, but as apostate Christians/Muslims/Jews/etc. We come to Buddhism saying, "Oh, right; no father-son-holy-ghost business." But what we really mean is "I like that Buddha-God fellow." What we mean is, "Well, I wanted to be fixed by one of the other Guys, but they didn't seem to be up for the job, so I'm going to try the new Guy on the block. Maybe he can do it." As a man with a mountain of problems, I can tell you, this new guy, the Buddha, can't fix your problems any more than the others could.

So, all this is true: I'm still broken and the Buddha can't fix me. Then why do I have such faith? Why do I trust in the words, in the teachings of a being I know can't do the one thing I want anyone, in this world or another, to do for me? Why do I trust a being who can't fix me, who can't make me whole?

The answer is simple. The Blessed One didn't say, "Come here and let me fix you." The Blessed One didn't say, "Trust in me and I will heal you." He didn't say, "Pray to the sky and all will be well." What the Blessed One did say was this: "The Way is not in the sky, the Way is in your heart." What he did say was, "Do not accept my words out of respect...." The Blessed One said, "Tathagatas teach in the world." What he said, and I'm paraphrasing here, is "Hey, get off your butt and fix yourself, 'cause no one else can do it for you."

So, I may be broken. I have a lot of baggage. I may spend the rest of my life in this prison. I have large closet so full of skeletons that I'll need more than one lifetime to deal with them. But I will do it, and I'll do it with a big Buddhist smile. Not because I'm especially righteous. Not because I'm so pure. Not because I'm particularly generous. Not because I'm exceptionally compassionate. But because I am a good Buddhist.

I'm a good Buddhist, not because I am these things, but because I aspire to be all of them, in body, speech and mind.

*James Hicklin resides in a maximum security prison in the midwest.
He is serving a life sentence without parole.*





There is no justice or injustice in classic Buddhist thought. Editor **Xianyang Carl Jerome** explores the incompatibility of such Western notions as retribution and revenge with the core teachings of the Buddha.

This is the second of a four-part series on Buddhist Ethics designed to explore some of the implicit and explicit moral guidelines used to make ethical decisions in our lives.

There is a deafening silence in the Dharma when it comes to Buddhist justice. And with good reason. Justice, and its intimate partner, righteousness, are, as we understand them, Western theistic concepts. Concepts like retribution, revenge and vengeance are central to Christian biblical norms and the American legal system, but are anathema to the Buddhist moral framework.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, in two of the earliest books, Exodus and Deuteronomy, we see the establishment of a definition of justice, a conceptual framework for what is just and righteous, that to this day remains our Western understanding of justice. The first of the Ten Commandments, in Exodus, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” implicitly establishes Yahweh as the intrinsic embodiment of justness and righteousness, in all his dealings with mankind. Deuteronomy is more explicit on this: “[Yahweh’s] word [meaning his inherent nature or actions] is perfect; for all his ways are justice; just and righteous He is.”

Later, in the New Testament Book of Matthew, justice takes on a stark new clarity in the principle of an eye for an eye. The idea that justice meant the exacting of unilateral retribution had its origin in the Code of Hammurabi, developed nearly 1200 years before Buddha and 1700 years before Jesus. This principle of retribution, that one should get what one deserves, and one should get it now, in this lifetime, became etched into our Western psyche by the moral centrality it has been given in the Christian testament with its soteriological now-or-never belief. This notion that every wrong deserves retribution in equal measure, and immediately, is inextricably tied to the American legal system's doctrine of a "fair and speedy" trial, a notion fundamentally incompatible with the Buddhist moral view.

There is hardly ever a mention of the word justice in the Pali literature.

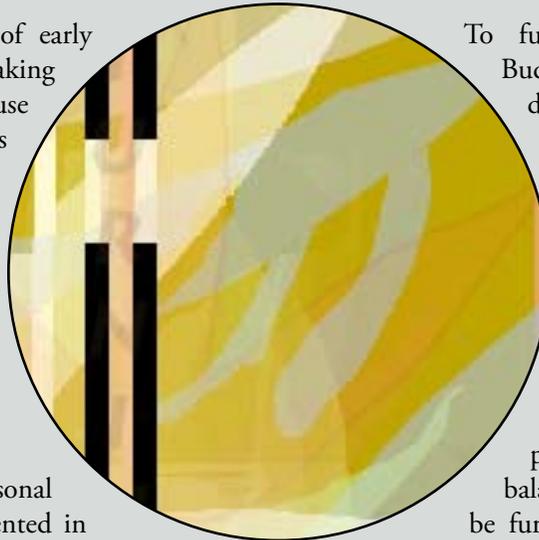
Why? Well, the canonized view of early Buddhism wasn't interested in making over the socio-political world because that samsaric world was seen as perpetuating greed, anger, and delusion—that samsaric world was the product of a deluded mind. In fact, early Buddhist thought was that there was no way to reform the system; there was, however, always an opportunity for personal liberation.

This belief that dramatic personal change is possible (as we see presented in the Angulimala Sutra and commentaries) arises from the belief that we, and all phenomena, are impermanent. The Western notion of a "criminal mind" or of "once a thief, always a thief" does not exist in Buddhist thought. Also, traditional Buddhist thought recognizes that by encouraging or advocating for any framework of "justice" one is starting a chain reaction, an endless back-and-forth of rival claims with each injustice-corrected producing a new injustice that needs correcting, ad infinitum.

Consider, for example, the death penalty vs life without parole. Which is just? Unjust? The answer is contradictory and situational. Offenders often have very different opinions about this, some requesting death sentences and a speedy execution, others seeing the death sentence as wholly unjust for what they describe as "a really bad day on the outside." Some

people in a family where a member has been murdered want the killer "to get the death penalty"; others want the killer to "suffer" a life sentence in prison. From a classical Buddhist perspective, all of these views, not one or the other, but all, are delusions of afflicted minds.

The principle of no-self leads Buddhists to the realization that others' suffering and their own suffering is not inherently different. This means that when I exact retribution from you—whether through the death penalty or by life imprisonment, to extend this example, I am in fact not getting "my fair shake," but instead causing myself and you more suffering. And because a key criterion in ethical decision-making is whether or not the action increases or decreases suffering, "justice" can be viewed as unlikely to pass the test for wholesomeness.



To further understand why Buddhism lacks any developed idea about justice, we need to remember that the Western legalistic idea of justice assumes that when a law is broken things go out of balance. Punishing the offender, and exacting retribution, supposedly puts things back into balance. Nothing could be further from the Buddhist worldview, where everything is empty, dependent and interdependent, and so nothing could be "out of balance."

In American Buddhism today some have adopted the view that compassion arises from seeing injustice and that we must take corrective action as a result. This seems fundamentally incompatible with the established Buddhist moral view, wherein compassion arises from Right View informed by Right Intention; those are the foundations upon which Buddhism builds compassion, not on the slippery mountainside of perceived injustice. That being said, this author is conflicted at the sight of "injustice"—most often now exercising restraint, but at other times feeling more activist leanings.

The strongest reason for this often hard-to-accept

lack of concern about justice, though, is because karma trumps justice in a big way. Karma embodies personal responsibility for all that has-is-will happen to us. Karma explains that there is no such thing as “causeless” suffering and that nothing is out-of-balance (and so nothing needs rebalancing to make it just). In a cosmos of causal interdependence we are responsible for everything that has-is-will happen to us. If we want to change

liberation, but in an activism aimed at changing the socio-political system so it “causes less suffering.” If we look at the act, the intention, and the completion in these examples: the intrinsic nature of the act, the intention behind that, and the likely outcome, it seems to this writer that one is skating on thin karmic ice. I contend that “justice” should not be an excuse to reduce Buddhism to a kind of ethical aromatherapy

When did imposing our values on others become a Buddhist value?

our karma, impermanence gives us a basis for doing that, but not through a rebalancing act. If the point of “Buddhist justice” and its active partner, engaged Buddhism or socially-engaged Buddhism, or of all the other justices: restorative justice, participatory justice, etc, is to change the world, then traditional Buddhist thought would view it as unwholesome. On the other hand, if the engagement is an act of compassion arising from Right View and Right Intention, then it arises from a strong wholesome base. But it is hard for this writer to see, as some modern Buddhists are claiming, that the bodhisattva vow to save all beings means we must act to change the social conditions with which we are uncomfortable. (Is that not the conceit of an afflicted self?) And it is hard for this writer to see social activism explained as a Buddhist practice based on a culturally expanded version of the Precepts—taking a vow not to kill, for example, and not to encourage others to kill for us, etc, is not intrinsically a call-to-action for abolishing the death penalty.

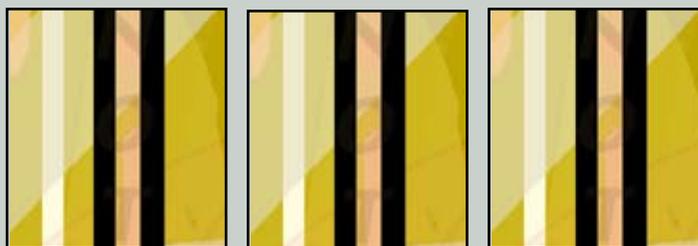
Nonetheless, many are following the lead of Thich Nhat Hanh in drawing on traditional Buddhist values, and applying them, not to attain personal

for making samsara smell better; Buddhism is an ethical practice designed to liberate us from samsara, not to sugarcoat dukkha.

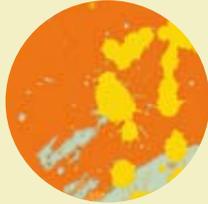
But there is wiggle room here, considerable wiggle room, even if this author finds it uncomfortable.

As Buddhism becomes more “American” it will naturally absorb more and more of the cultural values of Americans at-large, particularly those who are practicing Buddhism. Historically, this absorption and subsequent evolution is what has happened to Buddhism as it moved from country to country—Taoist values entered Indian Buddhism as it moved into China, Shinto values entered Chinese Buddhism as it moved into Japan, and so on. As this is happening now, here in America, a concern for justice and socially engaged justice is evolving into our practice and, it appears, will eventually become an inherent part of American Buddhism, however tenuously its justification may be, based on traditional Buddhist principles.

In this, as in all matters, may we be guided by Right View and directed by Right Intention, and may our motives be informed by Wisdom.



OFFERINGS



BEFORE MEDITATION

In gratitude we offer this incense to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas throughout space and time. May it be fragrant as earth herself, reflecting our careful effort, our whole-hearted awareness, and the fruit of understanding slowly ripening. May we be companions of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. May we awaken from forgetfulness and realize our true home.



AFTER MEDITATION

May this merit be extended to all, and may we together with all sentient beings, achieve the awakened way.



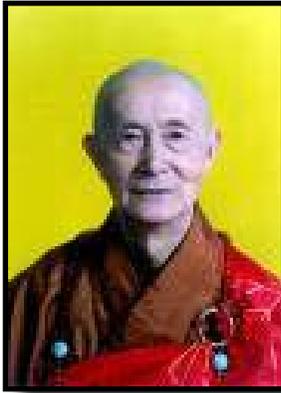
BEFORE MEALS

This food comes to us from the labor of beings past and present. Through it our body-mind is nourished and our practice is sustained. Gratefully we accept these gifts.

TRANSLATIONS



A Rightview Quarterly Feature of Original Translations



APPLYING THE DHARMA TO STUDYING BUDDHISM

by Venerable Yin Shun Fashi

Original English
translation from the
Chinese by
Rev. Jenkuan

English language
and publication
editing by Xianyang
Carl Jerome

While the subject of this essay is tightly focused, in fact, one is simultaneously being advised to use these exact same principles and applications to “studying” any dharma, any phenomena, in one’s daily life.

“Applying the Dharma to studying Buddhism” is essential; sometimes I would even say it is utterly essential. So what does it mean when we say, “Applying the Dharma to studying Buddhism”? Raising the question is relatively easy; answering it is not. I would like to offer my thoughts here. I do not dare to say that my understanding is absolutely right, for my thoughts are only a single drop in the vast ocean of the Dharma. Nonetheless, I offer my understanding as a reference for those who share my belief that we should apply the Dharma to studying Buddhism.

I consider myself as one who applies the Dharma to studying Buddhism. In my opinion, the Buddhism we study should be about all the Buddha taught: the teachings, the truths, the practices, and the results, not only the commonly known pair notions like emptiness-existence, principle-phenomenon, and mind-nature. The teachings refer to the sutras, the vinayas, and the sastras, as well as Buddhist art.

Buddhist art is included here because any objects appearing to our six sense faculties can all be the substance of teachings. Like the sutras, these works of art express and elucidate the meanings of Buddhism. The truths refer to all kinds of truths and to the ultimate profound truth. The practices refer to cultivation techniques for individuals, and the rules that guide monastics towards a harmonious sangha. The results refer to the levels of attainment of Sravaka, Pratyekabuddha, and Buddha.

The Buddhism we study refers to everything the Buddha taught, and the Dharma, qualified here as methodology, refers to the fundamental principles of Buddhism.

The nature of Dharma, the abiding of Dharma, and the realm of Dharma, as expounded by the Buddha, refer to the authentic Dharma whose nature is spontaneous, stable, and universal. This is the authentic Dharma pervading all places, all times, all phenomena. From something as large as the universe to the small dust particle, each and all are in agreement with the authentic Dharma. It is said that “no phenomenon goes beyond the nature of Dharma” and that “all phenomena are thusness.” This authentic Dharma is the fundamental Dharma and the pervading Dharma of all phenomena. Only when we are in accord with this authentic Dharma and apply it to our study of Buddhism, will our study be regarded as “applying the Dharma to studying Buddhism.” Only then will the methods and results of our study not become twisted nor violate the Buddhadharmas taught by Shakyamuni Buddha.

What is this authentic Dharma? Moving from the realm of relativity to that of absoluteness, authentic Dharma refers to emptiness, to suchness, sometimes called “the seal of the one true character.” From a perspective of the expanded realm of all phenomena, authentic Dharma refers to the three Dharma Seals and pertains to

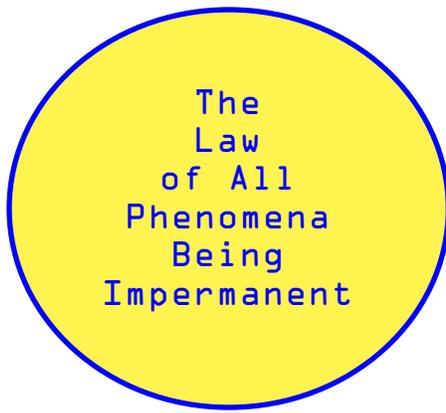
dependently originated phenomena,—namely “all phenomena have the nature of impermanence,” “all phenomena have the nature of no-self,” and “the nature of nirvana is tranquility/cessation.”

Due to the nature of impermanence, if we observe all phenomena vertically (i.e., from the perspective of the temporal continuum), they do not even last for as long as the shortest time or a single thought. They encompass a series of arisings and ceasings among similar phenomena. Due to the nature of no-self, if we observe all phenomena horizontally (i.e., from the perspective of space), they appear to be accumulating and disassociating occurrences that are rotationally interrelated, mutually dependent and complementary. If we perceive all phenomena directly through our senses, they have the Dharma-nature of tranquility/cessation that is without nature and that is neither arising nor ceasing.

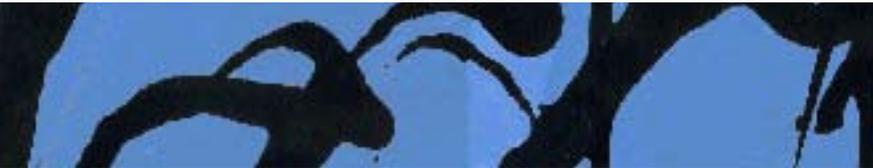
As stated in Nagarjuna’s treatise, *The Malamadhyamakakarika*: “The three Dharma Seals are essentially a single Dharma Seal.” If a single Dharma Seal is violated, all three Dharma Seals can no longer stand. This truth must not be diminished. This is what the Buddha expounded: the ultimate Dharma pertaining to all phenomena is also the Dharma pertaining to common phenomena, those manifested in space and time. This is the principle to be held and to be followed while studying Buddhism. In my opinion, only this can be considered “applying the Dharma to studying Buddhism.” Only in this way can we understand Dharma without distorting the Dharma taught by the Buddha and by Buddhism as a whole. In my opinion, when studying the Dharma we should always reflect seriously on whether or not we have really applied this Dharma to studying Buddhism.

WHAT IS THIS AUTHENTIC DHARMA?

MOVING FROM THE REALM OF RELATIVITY TO THAT OF ABSOLUTENESS, AUTHENTIC DHARMA REFERS TO EMPTINESS, TO SUCHNESS; IT IS SOMETIMES CALLED “THE SEAL OF THE ONE TRUE CHARACTER.”



FIRST, it must be admitted that Dharma is always in a process of continuous evolution and change. “Regardless of whether or not a Buddha is vborn in the world, the nature of Dharma always exists within all phenomena.” This is in accord with the constant and universal nature of all phenomena, which is change. Once the nature of Dharma is skillfully spelled out, expressed in scriptures made of words, terms, sentences, and chapters, once it is developed into conceptual theories, then it is handed down as the conventional truth and, as all phenomena are impermanent, it constantly changes. If we view phenomena as “composed,” if we view phenomena as activities, it becomes more clear. This extends to the systems designated for practice and to the Dharma-objects used for explaining Dharma. All are constantly evolving.



The Buddha initially ordained five monks at Deer Park. Few in number, their faculties sharp, the Buddha created only a few simple rules by which they should live. As the number of ordained

Twelve years after that talk in Deer Park the Buddha gave his first ordination, the monastic precepts were formulated, and the organization of the sangha became stricter and more exacting. Over the years, regulations for the sangha were formulated, adjusted or amended, and even reformulated. After the Buddha entered into nirvana, his disciples split into different sanghas because of different understandings and interpretations of these rules. Some of them started with a strict attitude toward abiding by the regulations and ended up with too great an emphasis on the trivial rules, such as the Sarvastivada sect. Some of them started with a flexible attitude concerning regulations and ended up with being too lax, such as the Mahasamghika sect.

When Buddhism reached China, monastics lived together by observing many although not all the regulations. Later on, temples emphasizing Vinaya took the lead in establishing their own *chanyuan* (meditation divisions), which were further developed in forest temples. In this way, the *qinggui* (pure regulations) formulated by the early Chinese masters gradually emerged. The *qinggui* were formulated differently from time to time and from place to place. Nowadays, there are even sangha groups centered on the study of Buddhist thought that are somewhat different from the sangha groups of the past that were centered on the Vinaya and meditation.

Impermanence entails both arising and ceasing

followers increased, in order to ensure that they lived together in harmony, to provide guidelines for practice, and to allow them to adapt to natural conditions arising around them, it became necessary to have a significantly greater number of rules than when there were only five disciples.

In short, once Buddhist monastic thinking and regulations became widespread, they could not avoid being dominated by the law of impermanence and change. If we view them as something absolute, or if we hold them as something that could only be adjusted in the

Buddha's time and also as something to be faithfully followed by the later generations and, for this reason, claim that they are always suitable everywhere and always applicable, in whatever place and for hundreds of generations, or if we hold them as something meant to be contemplated and adjusted only by the ancient masters and to be followed by us without question, then we truly violate the Dharma, i.e., the Dharma that the law of all phenomena is impermanent.

Impermanence entails both arising and ceasing. Arising means the arising relative to dependent origination. It is not the arising that comes from the effects formerly existing within causes or

from arising that occurs without any cause. We need to apply dependent origination, which is without permanent nature and which pertains to all phenomena being impermanent, to studying and to understanding arising in Buddhism of a sect, a thought, a practice, or a norm.

Let's take Asanga's Mind-Only theory as an example. If someone says that the Mind-Only theory expounded by Asanga [see below] was already fully and perfectly established during the Buddha's time, and that what Asanga did is merely to hear it from Maitreya and to propagate it without any adjustment, then he is saying tha

Asanga (4th-5th centuries AD)

Excerpted from The Philosophy of Mind-Only by Peter Della Santina

The Mind-Only school is one of the philosophical backbones of the Mahayana tradition. There are several names by which the Mind-Only (sometimes Consciousness-only) school is known, the three most popular being *Chittamatra* (school affirming Mind-Only), *Vijnanavada* (school affirming consciousness), and *Yogachara* (school affirming the unity of meditation and action). *Yogachara* refers to the union of the practice of meditation (yoga) and conduct (*achara*). The Mind-Only school arose as an independent and identifiable philosophical tradition in the fourth to fifth centuries AD—more specific dating than that is not possible.

Asanga, along with his brother Vasubandhu, played a central role in the formulation and popularization of the philosophy of this school. He was born in Northwest India, in what is now Pakistan. Through his writings and skill as a teacher and debater, he popularized the Mind-Only philosophy within a relatively short time.

These two great scholars produced a large number of works defining, categorizing, and setting forth the Mind-Only philosophy. Asanga is famous for his *Stages of the Bodhisattva Path (Bodhisattvabhumi)*, *Compendium of the Abhidharma (Abhidharmasamuchchaya)*, written from the Mahayana or Mind-Only viewpoint, and many commentaries on major works of the Mind-Only school.

Asanga's commentaries to a number of important texts of the Mind-Only school are attributed to Lord Maitreya. Although modern scholars have attempted to identify Maitreya as an historical personality, the attribution clearly meant Maitreya, the future Buddha who resides in the *Tushita Heaven*, and not an historical personality. The major works of the Mind-Only school attributed to Maitreya, and likely by Asanga, include the *Distinction of the Middle from the Extremes (Madhyantavibhaga)* and *The Ornament of the Mahayana (Mahayanasutralankara)*. They are said to have been transmitted by Maitreya to Asanga, who wrote them down and added commentaries.

something already existed in the Buddha's time and re-appeared many centuries later in Asanga's time. This is an erroneous concept of "self-arising" and it is not arising from dependent origination that is in accord with the principle that all phenomena are impermanent.

theory already existed, that is, there were already sentences and chapters which expounded the Mind-Only theory. The stage where Asanga stood came from innumerable and complex evolutions involved with various thoughts and responses to challenges.

If one's prejudice is too strong, it becomes difficult to properly understand the true meaning of scriptural writings.



If one says that Asanga's Mind-Only theory did not at all exist during the Buddha's time, but was created by Asanga under Maitreya's name or was directly created by some sect, this is not correct either, but is the erroneous concept of "arising from others." If one says that Asanga's Mind-Only theory exists spontaneously and appears because of the triggering of various sects and the various environmental needs, this still falls into the erroneous concept of "arising combined with self and others," not from dependent origination.

If one says that Asanga's Mind-Only theory exists spontaneously without any cause and condition, this is the erroneous view of "arising without cause."

Then how did Asanga's Mind-Only theory come about or how was it established? It is a developing process relative to dependent origination and dependent establishment, and it is an illusion—a developing process without any permanent nature.

We should first try to understand that Asanga's Mind-Only theory signifies an establishing stage of an evolving process of a theory, when its characteristics and essence were adequately and positively formed. There exists no unchanging self-nature of the Mind-Only theory. The nature of the Mind-Only theory is established during the process of evolution and, even after being established, it is still constantly evolving. During the Buddha's time, the inclination to form the Mind-Only

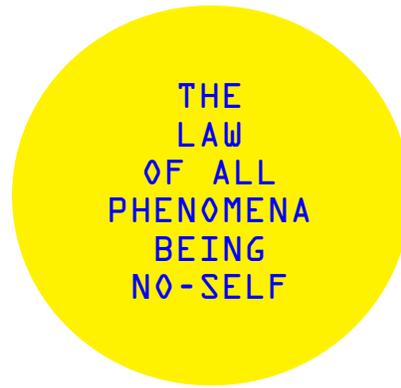
With regard to cessation relative to the law that all phenomena are impermanent, according to the view of dependent origination, that is, being

empty of permanent nature in all phenomena, cessation signifies neither annihilation nor extinction. It is a kind of phenomena unified with causes and conditions. The same kind of existence as arising If we skip over fact that cessation is one of the dependently originated phenomena, then cessation does not depend on any cause/condition. Therefore in the study of Dharma, one should look into the causes and conditions with regard to the diminishing, extermination, and abolishment of a sect, a thought, or a norm. Cessation is a kind of dependently originated phenomena. Thus, it will have an influence on future events becoming causes and conditions for the arising and ceasing of later thought and norms. Indeed, what has passed has passed; history cannot recur. Yet in dependently originated evolution, historical reality always closely influences future events.

Most modern Buddhist scholars carry out their investigations and studies from an historical perspective. Often the theory of impermanence is not used properly in their investigations, so they frequently come to silly conclusions. Some scholars start their studies sympathizing with the Buddhism of the Buddha's time as they understand it. They herald the Sri Lankan and Thai styles of Buddhism and criticize others. This kind of thinking not only passes over the inevitable evolution, which fluctuates in accordance with the movement of time and space, but also ignores all the efforts and results made by the later generations in their quest to discover the true meaning of Buddhism. The

notion that “what is more ancient is more genuine and more perfect” brings those Sinological scholars to the final step where Confucius adjusted cultural norms by reapplying the ancient authority. Similarly, I think, those poor scholars working on early Indian Buddhism also cannot avoid the fallacy that the Buddha is an achiever in the development of Indian culture.

Some scholars, bewildered by this theory of evolution, maintain that from Hinayana to Mahayana, from the sect of emptiness (i.e., Madhyamika) to the Mind-only, and to the Tantrayana, even from Action Tantra to Performance Tantra to the Highest Yoga Tantra, the latter is the more advanced and more perfect. This is an erroneous view. Observing that all phenomena are impermanent, arising and ceasing, the arising and ceasing of the former series and the arising and ceasing of the latter series, that is, the interlocking mutation of the former causes and latter effects, are neither destined evolution nor devolution. No matter the whole Buddhism, or a certain thought, or a certain norm, or a certain practice, they are all the vicissitude phenomena of either improving or declining or maintaining. In each phase, there are still establishments of the new and abolition of the old. It becomes extremely complicated, regardless of whether one looks into each individual sect, thought, norm, etc., or into Buddhism as a whole. Those maintaining “the more ancient the more genuine” pass over the reality that the understanding and practice of Buddhism’s true meaning was often enhanced and glorified. Those maintaining “the more ancient the more perfect” also pass over the aberrant developments and the unhealthy evolutions in later Buddhism. Thus, it is important to apply the Dharma, that is, the law of all phenomena being impermanent, the Buddhist view of evolution, to find the sound development and normal adaptation of the true meaning of Dharma.



THE LAW of all phenomena being no-self is the center of the dependently originated three Dharma Seals and is pivotal in accomplishing the goals of Buddhist practices. Let me temporarily put aside the true meanings to be perceived by looking into no-self and explain two ways it should be applied to study. While studying Dharma, one should hold the spirit of no-self. No-self means being separated from the erroneous view of self, the divine self, and not studying or ingesting studies from the notion of self.

In the study of Buddhism, this means to study without being obstinate about any of one’s own prejudices. If one’s subjective prejudice is too strong, it becomes difficult to properly understand the true meaning of scriptural writings. From the Buddhist viewpoint, knowledge comes from and is the result of an interdependent accomplishment between the knower (i.e., that capable of knowing) and the observed objects (i.e. that being known). There is no knowledge that is purely objective and completely separated from the subjective. Moreover, knowledge is constrained by one’s previous learning habits. Only if we can eliminate this prejudice in the process of seeking knowledge, can we arrive at a close understanding of the scriptural meanings.

Sectarianscholarsare usually obstinate about using their own understanding and practices as standards. In their lectures and studies they may disregard the contents of a scripture for its apparent non-conformity to their

There is no knowledge that is purely objective and completely separated from the subjective.

**NIRVANA
SIGNIFIES
REALITY
AND
LIBERATION**

beliefs instead of blindly applying what they have learned to interpret it. It is like taking one's hat off and forcibly trying to put it on another person, assuming it will be a good fit without even looking at the size of the other person's head. If one applies this prejudice to studying Buddhism, erroneous results can be produced all too easily. This application of the law of no-self to the study of Buddhism is not easy to achieve, but we have to pay attention to it and apply it in order to gradually mitigate our personal prejudices.

Chinese Madyamika Master Jiexiang said, "Once the white lies are swept away, one can then see the real meaning of a scripture." This is indeed a hard-to-obtain "wise saw." When studying a sutra or a sastra, one should never fancy oneself too smart to be prejudiced, nor should one completely rely on the ancient explanations as shown in the commentaries. The best way is to

look for explanation inside the scripture itself and to illuminate the meaning by studying back and forth between the earlier and the later iterations. If one cannot find an exact understanding, then he can refer to other scriptures that conceptually are closely related to this scripture.

For example, when studying the Prajna Sutra, one may want to refer to other sutras, like the Visvasatbrahma Pariprccha Sutra, the Chishi, the Wuxing, and the Aksayamati Sutra, and the commentaries, like the Malamadhyamaka-karika and the Mahaprajnaparamita Sastras. If one cannot understand the teaching, the material can be set aside for a while. Take notes or try to find other references in a leisurely way. One should not give strained interpretations, drawing farfetched analogies to sustain one's own interpretations.

Be aware of those things that are unclear. Allow understanding to develop naturally as knowledge is broadened. This kind of study surpasses mere memorizing, copying, and translation of commentaries. The concept of no-self is

Zhaozhou (Joshu in Japanese) is generally recognized as the greatest Chan master of the Tang Dynasty. He had a profound enlightenment experience when he was eighteen, which indicated to him that there was a Path worth pursuing. Enlightenment was, for him, not an end but simply a step on a Path. So after forty years of training with Nanchuan, his enlightenment master, he wandered in China until he was into his eighties seeking other Chan masters from whom he could learn. At a very old age, he finally settled into Zhaozhou Guanyinyuan Temple, gathering pupils around him. He instructed gently and quietly, but in very sharp and short ways, teaching his own distinctive version of Chan. The following story illustrates his teaching style, which was often couched in direct and paradoxical language:

Once a novice at the Temple came to Zhaozhou and asked, "I am a novice; do you have any instructions to give me?"
Zhaozhou said, "Have you eaten breakfast?"
The novice answered, "Yes, I have."
Zhaozhou then said, "If you've finished breakfast, wash your bowl."

In other words, do what is a matter of course as a matter of course.

Twelve cases in *The Blue Cliff Record* and five in *The Gateless Gate* are attributed to Zhaozhou. He is, however, best known for the first koan in *The Gateless Gate*: A monk asked Zhaozhou, "Does a dog have Buddhature or not?" Zhaozhou replied: "Mu."

something we frequently talk about and hear about; when studying or handling our daily affairs, we need to at least apply it as well as we can.

Once again, when studying from the viewpoint of all phenomena having no-self, one understands that there is no independently existing phenomenon in the world. Instead, all phenomena are related to others and, in the process of either mutually absorbing or mutually rejecting, they become the reality of the entire world. Thus, all phenomena are without self and they are only existences unified by the various causes and conditions that are mutually dependent and accomplished. All phenomena are like this. Of course Buddhadharma can not be an exception.

IT IS a revolving interrelationship.

This refers not only to an internal relationship in accord with different times, but also to one that is external and closely associated with other scholarship. In the interdependent formation between one and another phenomena that are without self. Moreover, the existences of all phenomena are the unification of various causes and conditions. All phenomena are the unification of various causes and conditions, they, within their seemingly outlook of a whole, in fact contain various natures and functions.

For instance, the Buddha's fundamental teaching, seems to be a unified entity, is extremely profound and diverse. Thus, the various differences should be understood from the perspective of one seemingly-unified entity. The one-taste Dharma, however, cannot be properly understood except from the aspect of the various differences. This signifies that the general aspect and the specific aspect of all phenomena without self are without obstruction. It is also because of this that the reality and the expedient adaptation of the Dharma has been inclined to develop with different focuses during the evolution of Buddhism.



Nirvana is the final target for all Buddhist practitioners. Some sutras establish nirvana from the perspective of all activities being impermanent. Thus, it is said that “because there exist arising and ceasing, nirvana (tranquility/cessation) is joyful.” Some establish the meaning of nirvana from the perspective of all phenomena being without self. Thus, it is said that “because there exists the nature of no-self, nirvana is non-arising, non-ceasing, spontaneous cessation, and cessation by its own nature.” There are also scriptural statements explaining nirvana from the perspective that all activities are impermanent, all phenomena are without self, thus illustrating the nature of tranquility/cessation from the perspective of no self.

In brief, nirvana refers to the tranquility/cessation nature of all dependently originated phenomena, the noble objects and the real and unrestricted objects that are perceived by the sentient beings—which is the unification of various conditions in the process of the dependently originated transmigration—who are separated from all the erroneous views and white lies. It is like the rushing up-roaring waves turning into a pond of peaceful spring water. It is like one moving from under the scorching hot summer sun to an autumn night full of cool moonlight, wet dew, and the aroma of cassia in the air. The study of Buddhism is for the achievement of nirvana. It is the real character of all phenomena without our mental contamination. It never separates from us, but we do not realize this.

Not only do investigators of Buddhadharma have to wholeheartedly understand the meanings of the

writings, but they also need to appreciate the impermanent and non-self nature of language and of writings. They should reflect the nature of cessation directly from the writings. In ancient times, many people with great virtue realized the noble object of cessation by reading only one sutra or hearing only one verse—for example, Sariputra heard the verse on the dependent origination, Huineng heard the sentence from the Diamond Sutra “One should detach from all attachments to generate the mind seeking enlightenment,” and so on. They were able to immediately realize the noble object of cessation. “Language by itself is empty of nature and is the character of emancipation.” If one can penetrate this view, study hard, and think properly, when reaching the ripe stage, it will not be difficult for one to attain immediate realization.

Nirvana signifies reality and liberation. Buddhist investigators should take it as the final goal of hard study. Thus, students of Buddhism should have confidence in pursuing the truth and attaining emancipation. The study of Buddhadharma means neither to learn bits and pieces of information for cocktail chatter, nor to equip oneself with credentials for earning fame and fortunes from scholarship, but to realize the truth through one’s own study and practice.

Like Shakyamuni Buddha, who sacrificed all his belongings to pursue the truth, Xuanzang [who became the pre-eminent student of the sixth century scholar-monk Kuiji] traveled to India to pursue Dharma. He went on steadfastly despite the many perils he encountered along the way. Zhaozhou [see page 20] was still traveling around by foot well into his eighties in search of the Dharma. If investigators of Buddhism develop this kind of mind, they will be able to come up with solutions to overcome any difficulty.

Searching for the truth in Buddhism can be carried out while removing all kinds of suffering for oneself and for others. If one pursues the truth merely academically, and does not purify his body and mind, he will maintain his previous patterns of study and work, of interacting with people and attending to life’s various matters. It is obvious that this person does not regard “achieving nirvana” as important, nor does he attempt to perceive the truth and achieve liberation. The study of Buddhadharma should not be like this.

In my opinion, only when one follows the dependently originated three Dharma Seals to study Buddhadharma, that is, following the Seal of One Real Character—all phenomena being empty of self-nature—is one really able to apply the Dharma to studying Buddhadharma. Only by studying this way can one truly catch the spirit of the Dharma in Buddhism.

Editor's note:

In producing this article, we followed Ven. Yinshun Fashi's recommendation to apply the Dharma to understanding the Dharma. We began with a strict, scholarly translation by Rev. Jenkuan. Xianyang Carl Jerome and Xian Huan Hillary Isaacs then smoothed the English text. We avoided translation solutions, like hyphenated and slashed pair wordings (with one exception), which would have made the text difficult to read and understand. Finally we reviewed and revised the article, with consideration given to the nature of the Chinese language in which Master Yinshun wrote, and to the specificities and ambiguities of both Chinese and English in the article. We recognized the boundaries and constraints of the languages and their evolution and departed from there to write a final draft; adding boxed explanatory material rather than modifying the text itself in a significant way when explanatory information seemed necessary. Throughout, we smoothed the language to reflect the character of the Master—a man of deep personal humility with an uncompromising respect for others and a broad, expansively intellectual, open mind.



BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MASTER YINSHUN FASHI

Born in 1906, Venerable Yin Shun is considered the greatest Chinese Buddhist intellectual of the 20th century. As student of Master Tai Xu, the reformer monk of the 1930's who shifted Chinese Buddhism from an insular monastic practice to a humanistic practice, he adopted and disseminated the new Chinese humanistic Buddhism. Briefly, humanistic Buddhism promotes the integration of spiritual practice into all aspects of our daily lives.

Buddhist monastics such as Venerable Masters Sheng Yen and Hsing Yun were deeply influenced by Master Yin Shun's teachings. As part of the reform, Humanistic Buddhism developed a less sectarian view of Buddhist practice and included all of the Buddha's teachings from the time of Gautama Buddha to the present, though shying away from secret and esoteric practices which seemed to fall outside the realm of an equanimous practice. The goal of Humanistic Buddhism is the bodhisattva way, which means to be an energetic, enlightened, and endearing person who strives to help all sentient beings reach liberation. Master Yin Shun is generally seen as the source and greatest supporter of *Tzu-Chi*, the International Buddhist Humanitarian Foundation.

MY BUDDHISM

By ROBERT GRANAT



My Buddhism.

What is that supposed to mean?

That each one of us can follow our own personal Buddhism? Yes, and not just can. Must.

For other religions such a statement would be blasphemy—either foolish delusion or spiritual pride, an attack on the holy faith. Men and women have been racked and burned for less.

For Buddhism it is otherwise. A true Buddhist wouldn't bat an eye, might even nod. Because while other religions tell us we can only find salvation through themselves, the Buddha tells us we can only find it through ourselves. "Work out your salvation with diligence"—such, from his deathbed, were his parting words. No other Founder, Avatar, Savior, Prophet or God ever put it to us quite like that.

And this distinction is the main reason why, after countless decades of non-commitment, of smelling, tasting and nibbling my way around the great smorgasbord of religions spread out for our modern spiritual appetites, a traditionless free-floater like me has finally helped himself to the Buddha's truth. The Buddha's Truth, not Buddhism.

The two are not synonymous, no more than the Christ's Truth is Christianity. My years in this century—indeed the morning's headlines—have taught me to be weary of “isms” in general, and Buddhism is no exception. Such skepticism, I suppose, shows I am a man of my time.

And I am that, certainly, a man of my time—what other option? And my time, this particular historical instant I'm a man of, in which I am bodied, minded, and sensed, turns out to be something special, not just one more tick of the cultural clock. This time is extraordinary and unprecedented. Sociologically, anthropologically, evolutionarily, it is a genuine first. It is, of course, another of those pivotal periods when the old center does not hold and things fall apart.

A brand new drama is being written for the human stage, and you and I have the rare good fortune—or misfortune—to find ourselves spotlighted and cued to act. So far, understandably, it has been mostly ad lib and improvisation.

Not that we couldn't see this coming, those of us who looked. For the past four or five centuries, we've been sensing it, the progressive warming of our physical and psychosocial environment, as if because of some slow and subtle greenhouse effect. Naturally, the effect on us has been traumatic.

Take our homes, our personal spots on this ball of spinning rock. Inside and outside our very lives have been deliquescing and flowing like lava into one amorphous habitat that has all but coated the planet.



Similar times have happened in the past. But this time, which happens to be our time, yours and mine, there is a crucial difference. Because now it's not merely our own center here and our own things. Everybody's centers and everywhere are not holding and their things too are falling apart. Social and cultural foundations are cracking and rending round the planet. So it's a time which invites and incites its passengers to act, to try some urgent do-it-yourselfing. Our psychic modules are popping rivets, splitting seams, flying apart.

Except for the global scale of it, human history has seen this happen before, of course. There's nothing aberrant or abnormal about things falling apart. Everything organized, whether by nature or by us, sooner or later disorganizes. Every life dies, every form deforms, every generation degenerates. This is the Law of the Universe, and nothing and nobody has ever succeeded in breaking that Law yet—though God knows we keep trying. *Never in all our millennia down here as Sapiens, the sole surviving species of the great genus Homo, have we found ourselves confronted by anything quite like this.*

Our familiar neighborhoods are being ingested into one amoebic Megasprawl, our local markets into one amoebic Megamart that sells us the products of an earth whose diversity is being steadily homogenized. The Megamart stocks the Megainventory, designed to feed our every need. Not our material needs only, but our aesthetic and spiritual needs as well. I'm here to speak of this last pair of needs, of the biological hunger for spirit that nature, for reasons her own, chose to implant into the genome of her top-of-the-line primate. If I refer to my individual case it's because that's the only case I know for sure.

In all this, many of us are able to find comforts enough, soporifics enough, fun things enough, junk foods enough, to survive till we die, without ever having to examine our lives. To help us we have our Megadistracting industry tirelessly coming out with fresh products to catch fancies and circumvent questions. And they're effective, too, some of them, for a while. So why bother our heads about meaning, about spiritual practice and freedom, just because we've got human minds inside them and the inborn capacity to self-transcend? Chickens have wings. Do chicken fly?

They do but rarely. Only when they're terrified.

Although I can't recall the specific events or circumstances, somewhere not very far along the line I must have gotten terrified. Been ambushed by the ordinary facts of human existence. It was probably around the time I was learning to spell—SICKNESS...AGE...DEATH.

More than a hundred generations earlier, these same simple facts also terrified a young Indian

**THE BUDDHA'S
WAY NEITHER
THREATENS NOR
COMMANDS, BUT
ONLY POINTS OUT
AND SUGGESTS.**

price, Siddhartha by name. Appalled him, rather, since he was not a child but an adult, a husband, a father. He personally had things easy until then, like a good many of us. He didn't have the technological salves and luxuries we do, but he had plenty of human ones, the finest available. By paternal decree he was pampered and sheltered, waited on hand a foot, his every whim indulged. Because of this extraordinary protection, he was a late starter—it took him twenty-nine years, legend tells us, to get ambushed by those four signs—the sick person, the old person, the dead person, and the monk. For most of us the attack comes earlier, and in my one case, it came traumatically. At eighteen I was a college boy who had never even attended a funeral and I was cowering in a frozen mudhole in a battlefield strewn with corpses.

After that Prince Siddhartha (and I) felt anxieties and yearnings deeper than whim. His pleasures and comforts no longer pleased him, as our own no longer appease so many of us. He looked at sentient existence and called it dukka, a wheel askew, uncentered on its axis. Full of pain and unsatisfactoriness. Something was wrong somewhere with life as we found it, something was fundamentally off.

West, East, North, South, then, now, we human beings all come to realize dukka eventually. It's the factual basis for every religion. In Western terms, Siddhartha had eaten of the fruit of knowledge and been exiled from Eden. In biological terms, he had outgrown the nest and was on his own.

Seduced by the charms of our sophisticated samsara, I was also twenty-nine and married before I really looked into the Buddha's Truth. I recall how I felt—like a captive koala bear finally offered eucalyptus buds. This man spoke to me directly, to my existential condition, to my essential being. Not just to mine personally, like a therapist. To ours, all of ours. (By twenty-nine, I had already realized that my deepest truth must lie beyond the personal.) The ancient Indian sage addressed me because he was addressing everyone. We spoke the same language. Time and space vanished and I understood him effortlessly, as if I had miraculously learned Pali.

The Buddha's contemporary, Confucius, reported that at fifteen he'd begun to study and at thirty he knew where to stand. Double those figures of us, for me at least. At twenty-nine I began to study and at fifty-six I took the Precepts. At sixty I knew where to stand. Or rather to sit. To practice. How to set out on that arduous eighteen-inch trek from the head to the heart. How to move from knowing-about to knowing, from talking to walking. To finally see, through the smog and racket of this Kaliyuga, that being it, not knowing it, is the Buddha's Truth.

Twenty-five centuries of daily practice is what has kept this gentle religion, which has rarely persecuted anybody in Buddha's name, from being wiped out by twenty-five centuries of violently religious persecutors.

So, after awakening to dukka, the second reason why I chose the Buddha's way was because it practices what it preaches—or better yet, it doesn't

preach in the first place. The Buddha's way neither threatens nor commands but only points out and suggests.

There are other reasons, more aesthetic and conceptual, for my choice. There is the breathtaking grandeur of the Buddha's cosmological panorama, the dimensionless vastness of its time scale, not just a few thousand years, but inconceivably long kalpas, and spatially a universe unending light years across—ideas which modern science is only now catching up to. Add: Its empirical method which antedated science's by several millennia. (Don't take my word about the method. Try it yourself.) The all-encompassing embrace of its compassion, reach out not just to one smallish species on a smallish planet, but to all sentient beings everywhere, known and unknown. The indivisibility of its ultimate reality, not one God somewhere but one ALL everywhere.

The incomparable magnanimity of its eschatology. One by one by one, all beings will reach Nirvana, including sinners and demons, though that could take forever. And, for Buddhism, there is forever. The Buddha's Truth doesn't belong to the Buddha either, and in contrast to most fellow avatars, he never claimed it did. It belongs to no one but comes built into the DNA of everyone. It is human Truth Itself, unchanging, incomparable, inviolate. The light of Buddha's enlightenment is the light of Truth Itself, the same light that, five hundred years afterwards, John saw shining in the Judean darkness which had not overcome it, that

still persisted two thousand years later when, from the midst of our own contemporary darkness, it was affirmed and demonstrated by Mohandas Gandhi. And if these two were not Buddhist in fact, they were Buddhists in truth, and that is the only Buddhism that counts. Truth never denies the facts, but it always transcends them.

That is why those who walk the Buddha's way can say, without irreverence, "if you meet the Buddha, slay him." Can say "my" Buddhism without hubris or heresy. Can say, "I'm a Buddhist but I'm not a Buddhist" without absurdity or paradox.



Robert Granat has published two novels: *The Important Thing and Regenesi*, and numerous essays and other writings. His interest in Buddhism goes back many years; his concern with "the important things" even further.

The ant who felled the giant tree

by Don Sloane

Karma is one of the most important and complex concepts in Buddhist philosophy. Karma is the science of cause and effect relations. However, there is much misunderstanding and controversy about the meaning of karma. Karma (Sanskrit; *kamma* in Pali) comes from the root verb, *kr*, meaning to act, to make, to do. In the West, karma has become a colloquialism. People say, “Oh, I lost my job because of my bad karma,” or “I always get a great parking place because of my good karma.” It is as if this karma is some sort of supernatural power or a type of luck to explain good and bad events. Karma is sometimes misunderstood in Eastern cultures as well. Where there is a strong belief in reincarnation, for example, people may believe that doing good deeds will ensure them of a better “next” life. Karma



is a much more profound concept, requiring a deeper understanding.

Buddha took special care to differentiate his view of karma from other schools of thought. The past action determinism school believed that all happiness and suffering was determined by past behavior, particularly from a past-life. The theistic determinism school taught that all happiness and suffering were caused by directives from a Supreme Being. The accidentalism or indeterminism school posited that all happiness and suffering had no understandable causes and were, in fact, simply random. Buddhism, however, emphasizes that those actions done purposefully and volitionally by the mind cause karma.

Since much of what we do is done without a clear understanding of cause and effect (ie, in ignorance, *avidya*), we often crave and cling to those ideas and things which cause suffering. When we observe a good action which leads to a good result, or a bad action which leads to a bad result, we may nod with some degree of clarity that all is right with the world. But when we observe a bad action which leads to a good result, we may be somewhat perplexed, although often gratified that at least things turned out okay. What is most disturbing is when we observe a good action which leads to a bad result. This brings up all sorts of thoughts about how things are somehow unfair! Such things cause suffering. It is good to look more carefully at the meaning of karma to lighten our suffering.

In eastern Missouri, where I live and practice, we are blessed with wonderful trees. People from all over the country, when they come to visit, remark about the lush foliage. Sometimes when we meditate on our breath we might be thankful that the trees are exchanging oxygen and carbon dioxide with us.

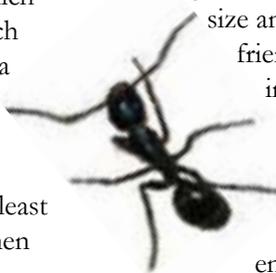
In Buddhism the tree is an especially rich symbol, as many key events in the life of the Buddha involve trees. In addition, trees have a deep linguistic connection to karma, as we shall see. Buddha was born in a tree grove in Lumbini with his mother leaning against a tree as she gave birth. Buddha had his enlightenment under a bodhi tree in Bodhi Gaya. The Buddha died among a grove of sala trees in Kushinagara. In Tibetan Buddhism the tree is a symbol of refuge. There are special paintings of the refuge tree which one would visualize during certain meditative practices and while reciting the refuge vows.

It is interesting to look at the Chinese pictogram for karma:

業

This is a picture of a tree 木 *ye*, the lower part of the character, upon which rests its leaves 業. *Ye* represents a tree crowned with its foliage 業. By extension, the meaning includes the moral foliage, the deeds of a person, the affairs upon which one exerts his or her activity, and what one acquires by these doings, most importantly, spiritual merits by helping others.

This reminds me of a story which occurred not long ago. I was visited by a friend who noticed a good size ant crawling on the floor of our house. My friend reached over to squash it, but quickly I interceded. I reached down, as many of us have done, and gently placed the ant in my cupped hands, I took the little ant outside, releasing him into the backyard. Upon my return the friend attempted to engage me in a conversation about how it was not possible for me, or anyone else, to go through life without killing bugs. In total agreement I responded that rescuing the ant was simply an “intentional act” to prevent harm where and when it was possible to do so. In karma, I explained, one’s intention is central to how actions affect the mindstream.



無明

The reason we do things that cause both suffering and negative karma is because of our ignorance (*avidya*). We believe that what we are doing will either bring about a good result or, more likely, will have at least no bad implications. Like a person driving in the dark without headlights, we cannot see what is ahead. Our mind is limited in seeing how events and phenomena are interconnected. Even more so, we often do not see how the mind will affect the mind itself.

Avidya is the first of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination in Buddhism. As such, *avidya* is considered the source of all suffering, directly leading to karmic volitional formations, consciousness, etc. *Avidya* is also at the root of all cravings and attachments.

The Chinese word for *avidya* is *wuming* 無明, literally “the absence of brightness.”

The character wú 無, on the left, is a picture of trees in a forest having been cut down, by extension meaning the absence of something that was once present. *Wu* in Chinese means ‘do not have’, ‘there is not’, or to ‘be without’. The character on the right is made up of the sun 日 next to the moon. 月. When the sun character is written on top of the moon character, the meaning of the character is “P” meaning change. *I* means first the sun, then the moon, the changing of day into night. When the sun is written next to the moon, the meaning is of intense light or brightness. *Wuming* is the absence of this brightness: ignorance.

An important story in Chan and Zen Buddhism is the tale of Emperor Liang and Bodhidharma, the great Patriarch who brought Chan Buddhism to China. Emperor Liang was quite proud of his knowledge of Buddhism. He enjoyed wearing ritual robes and gave large endowments to the temples.

Proud of his knowledge and his contributions to Buddhism, the Emperor asked Bodhidharma, “Since I came to the throne, I have built many temples, published numerous scriptures, and supported countless monastics. How great is the merit in doing all these great deeds?” “No merit whatsoever” was Bodhidharma’s shocking reply.

The Emperor had often heard teachings from renowned masters who said, “Do good and you will receive good; do bad and you will receive bad. The Law of Cause and Effect (karma) is unchangeable-- effects follow causes as shadows follow figures.” But now, the greatest Buddhist teacher of his time had declared that he had earned no merit at all. The Emperor was thoroughly perplexed.

The Emperor had failed to understand Bodhidharma’s words: one is not really practicing the teaching of the Buddha if one does good deeds with the desire or intention to gain merit for oneself. Such actions are just for satisfying one’s own ego, or for promoting one’s own public image. The selfless intention of doing good deeds to help others is what brings about merit.

Karma is defined by intentional actions. It is the intention that is most important. To understand karma one must have great insight into the causes and conditions leading up to an action or event. Karma is not a concept of

mere predestination, any more than our genetic make-up predetermines what choices we make in life.

An understanding of this interconnection of cause and effect with free will is enhanced by looking at *vipaka* in Chinese.

果報

Vipaka is the logical result of karma, as in the fruits of one’s actions. In Chinese (果報 *guobao* in pinyin) the meaning of the two characters is directly related to karma. The character on the left 果 *guo*, is a picture of a tree 木 upon which rests a head, 田 in this case representing the fruit of the tree. The character on the right, 報 *bao*, is a bit more complex. The right side 報 (pronounced *fu* when by itself) is a picture of a hand holding a scepter, representing authority or an exceptional ability to have control. Interestingly, the left side has a double meaning. Most Chinese Buddhists know this character as *xing* 幸 meaning a fortunate man who triumphs over obstacles. However, there is a less common, subtle reference to *nieh* 孽 written nearly the same way, meaning a man who has committed a crime.

The character 報 *bao* contains two sides of a person’s character, 幸 *xing* and 孽 *nieh*: the man who is good who triumphs over obstacles and the man who succumbs to obstacles and commits crimes. This duality is brought under the free will of 報 *fu*, such that in 果報 *guobao* the choices manifest as the fruits (果 *guo*) of one’s actions. The choice and skill a person uses to do good for others is what leads to the accumulation of merit in the Buddhist philosophy.

There is a philosophical debate within Buddhism as to whether or not a fully realized Buddha is subject to karma. Karma, by its very definition, is so pervasive that it penetrates all phenomena. However, a Buddha is, by its very definition, a being who has total free will, rooted in undefiled Buddha-nature, and is no longer subject to past karma. Because Buddhism is non-dualistic, in its sense of ultimate reality, this question presents as an enigma. If a Buddha is free from karma, then how is karma universal?

If a Buddha is not free from karma, then why pursue Buddhahood and nirvana if one is to be forever stuck in the wheel of life and death that will always be subject to suffering? Puzzles such as this are described in the Zen tradition through stories which contain a koan, a riddle that can only be answered by a unification of body, speech and mind.

One such question was asked by Ejo, “What is meant by the expression: ‘Cause and effect are not clouded?’” This question refers to the koan known as Hyakujo’s Fox.

When Hyakujo (also known as Pai-Chang Huai-Hai) delivered a certain series of sermons, an old man always followed the monks to the main hall and listened to him. When the monks left the hall, the old man would also leave. One day, however, he remained behind and Hyakujo asked him, “Who are you, standing there before me?” The old man replied, “I am not a human being. In the old days of Kaashyapa buddha, I was a head monk living here on this mountain. One day a student asked me, ‘Does a man of Enlightenment fall under the yoke of causation or not?’ I answered, ‘No, he does not.’ Since then I have been doomed to undergo five hundred rebirths as a fox. I beg you now to give the turning word to release me from my life as a fox. Tell me, does a man of Enlightenment fall under the yoke of causation or not?” Hyakujo answered, “He does not ignore [cloud] causation [cause and effect].” No sooner had the old man heard these words than he was Enlightened.

This riddle speaks to the understanding that from the point of a Buddha, karma and enlightenment are one. As the commentary of the Mumonkan states, “A Buddha is united with causation.” No one, not even a Buddha, is above moral causation. But for a fully enlightened one, to act in a way not in correspondence with moral causation would be against the principles of being enlightened.

Four days after freeing the ant from the house, I was sitting peacefully in meditation on the back porch overlooking the woods. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the wind was scarcely a breeze. Unexpectedly, I heard a creaking sound, followed by more sounds of cracking. Suddenly there was a loud crash. I looked out into the woods and saw that one of the large trees had fallen into the clearing. I called out, thinking that a woodsman might have been working there, but no one answered.

Then it occurred to me: it had taken four days for that little ant to cross the clearing and to find his way back to his favorite tree. Likely he was met there by his family and friends. Hungry and tired, he must have told them of his harrowing journey to freedom. Climbing up the tree, the little ant must have seen a most juicy morsel of exposed rotten heartwood. Opening his mouth as wide as he could, he took one giant bite. The tree swayed, creaked, cracked and crashed to the ground. How amazed all the ants were! Not only had this little ant escaped from the prison of a grassless land, walked fearlessly for days in an uncharted field of grass, he had, with one chomp, felled the mighty tree so that all could feast.

Little did the ants know that this tree had lived on the common ground between my neighbor’s property and my own backyard. When I called to inform my neighbor of the damage (leaving out the part about the ant), he became quite distressed. “Who is going to pay for this? Last time we had a tree removed it cost \$800!”

I thought about this event first from the point of view of the ants. They had no intention of causing anyone distress. Next, from the point of view of the tree removers. If trees did not fall in peoples’ yards, they would be out of business--their children need to eat, too.

**We are all interconnected, whether we know it or not.
That is our karma.**



Don Sloane began studying Tibetan Buddhism under the guidance of Lama Lodo Rinpoche, a disciple of great Kagyu teacher, Kalu Rinpoche in the mid-1990’s. He has been a student of Master Ji Ru, from whom he took the Refuges and received the Dharma name Xian Kuan, for the past four years.

Begin by understanding your Self



Ven. Master Jen-Chun

To learn Buddhism, you must begin by understanding yourself.

It is the most difficult task. If you are able to understand yourself, you will be able to understand everything around you. You will be able to subdue or dissolve your defilements — internally you will not be trapped by your-“self” and externally you will not be disturbed by the environment.

In order to acquire such ability, one must learn to meditate. Meditation helps us focus our minds and not be scattered. Once the mind is focused, then we can contemplate the Dharma. After the mind is focused and settled, how does one contemplate “no-self”?

Most ordinary people are attached to the notion of a real self. They believe in the existence of a “self” that is permanent and dominant. Believing in permanence is when one thinks that there is a real self within our body and mind.

When one has this belief, one must ask oneself the question: Where is this self?

If it is in us then we should be able to isolate it and identify it.

Even if we were to use X-ray, would we be able to see the self? After investigation and scrutiny, we will come to the conclusion that there is ***no self that is permanent.***

Believing in dominance is when one thinks that one has total control over one's own life. If that's the case, then one would be able to stop death or sickness. Even with today's medical advancements, we still have no say over our lives when it comes to sickness or death. Therefore, how true is dominance?

If we cannot identify a real self, and we recognize that we do not have dominance over our lives, then where is this real self that we think exists?

By persistently asking ourselves the above questions during meditation, gradually our notion of a self can be dissolved.

When the Dharma refers to the self, it refers to the conditioned self — the self that arises from causes and conditions. Understanding that the self is due to all sorts of causes and conditions, we can dissolve all kinds of conflicts, and establish all kinds of wholesome conditions.

We must learn to make good use of this conditioned self and dissolve the notion of a real self.



For the past 20 years, MASTER JEN-CHUN has led a simple life in New Jersey, teaching with the goal of creating a pure form of Buddhism in the United States. He emphasizes the study and practice of Dharma, instead of ritual practices and ceremonies. He is founder and spiritual leader of Bodhi Monastery in New Jersey.

5 Versions of the

5 Mealtimes Contemplations

The Five Contemplations are recited at mealtime in monasteries throughout the world. The great appeal of these five simple sentences over the last twenty-five centuries is due to the depth of compassion and wisdom inherent in them.

These few lines gently remind us to be fully present in the moment, to walk lightly on this earth, and to consider the purpose of our being here. They remind us to be virtuous in body, speech and mind; to be alert to unwholesome acts, particularly greed, anger, and delusion. These Five contemplations are, in a way, the essence of the Buddha's teaching.

1 Official Japanese Soto Zen Version

We reflect on the effort that brought us this food and consider how it comes to us.

We reflect on our virtue and practice, and whether we are worthy of this offering.

We regard greed as the obstacle to freedom of mind.

We regard this meal as medicine to sustain our life.

For the sake of enlightenment we now receive this food.

2 Diamond Sangha Version

First, we consider in detail the merit of this food and remember how it came to us;

Second, we evaluate our own virtue and practice, lacking or complete, as we receive this offering;

Third, we are careful about greed, hatred, and ignorance, to guard our minds and to free ourselves from error;

Fourth, we take this good medicine to save our bodies from emaciation;

Fifth, we accept this food to achieve the Way of the Buddha.

3 Thich Nhat Hanh's Version

This food is the gift of the whole universe—the earth, the sky, and much hard work.

May we live in a way that makes us worthy to receive it.

May we transform our unskillful states of mind, especially our greed.

May we take only foods that nourish us and prevent illness.

We accept this food so that we may realize the path of practice.

4 Anonymous Version

1. What food is this?

(Contemplate the origin of the food and how it reached you.)

2. Where does it come from? *(Contemplate the amount of work necessary to grow the food, prepare it, cook it and bring it to the table.)*

3. Am I worthy to eat this food? *(Contemplate your practice and how much you deserve this food.)*

4. When should I eat and benefit from this food? *(Contemplate the necessity for food in order to maintain a healthy body.)*

5. How should I eat this food? *(Contemplate the Right Understanding that food is properly eaten only so you can walk the Path.)*

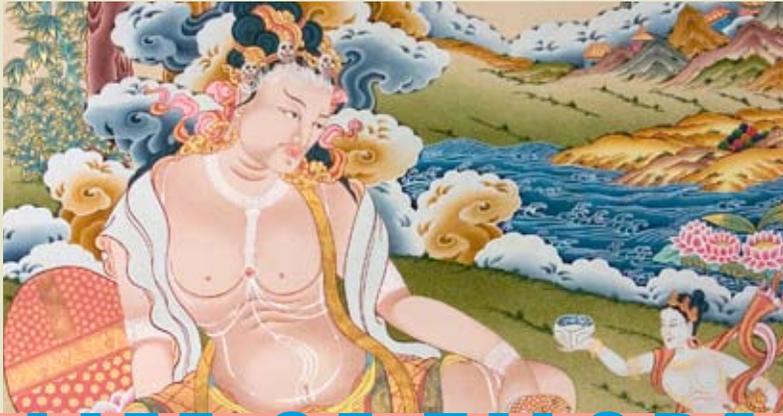
5 Mid-America Buddhist Association's Version

1. I contemplate how much positive potential I have accumulated in order to receive this food.

2. I contemplate my own practice, and only if there are no defects do I deserve these offerings.

3. I contemplate my mind, cautiously guarding it from wrongdoing, greed, and other defilements.

4. I contemplate this food, treating it as wondrous medicine to nourish my body.



LIFE OF TILOPA

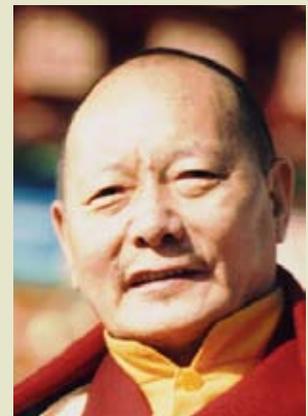
by Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche

Translated by Chojor Radha, and edited by Tina Armond

The Karma Kayu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism traces its origins to Shakyamuni Buddha through Marpa the Great Translator, who traveled to India to bring authentic Buddhist teachings to Tibet. His teacher, Naropa, received the lineage transmission from Tilopa, and so on back to the Buddha himself. Marpa's most famous student was the greatest yogi in all of Tibet, the renowned Jetsun Milarepa, who passed the teachings on to Gampopa, and so on through a succession of reincarnations to the present day with His Holiness the 17th Karmapa. This is the first in a series of biographies of these early lineage holders. We are indebted to the Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, the North American seat of His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa, for permission to print this series of biographies.

Tilopa (988-1069) was born as the king of a province in India. Although as a king he had always possessed wealth and title, his mind was not completely satisfied and he left his kingdom to find a teacher of the Dharma. He searched India in all directions for such a master.

Nagarjuna, knowing that Tilopa was searching for a teacher and would soon be approaching, pretended that he was stuck in the middle of a very wide river. When Tilopa came to that place, he asked Nagarjuna what he was doing. Nagarjuna answered that he wanted to cross the river but was stuck in the middle, unable to cross and unable to return. Tilopa promised that he would carry him to the other side. Nagarjuna replied that since he was very big and Tilopa was very small, how could he possibly be able to carry him to the other side of such a huge river? Tilopa, however, was intent upon keeping his word, and because of his determination was able to carry Nagarjuna to the other side.



Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche

After Tilopa helped Nagarjuna cross the river, Nagarjuna said, “Oh courageous son of a noble family, it is your courage and determination that enabled us to cross the wide river!” Nagarjuna predicted that because Tilopa’s courage and willpower were so effective, he would be able to work to benefit living beings, and told him to return to his kingdom and become a king once again.

When Tilopa returned to his kingdom to look after his people he found his country in a state of crisis and engaged in a war with another powerful state in India. Because Tilopa was king, his subjects feared that they would be unable to defeat their enemy as Tilopa seemed so small, weak, and powerless. Tilopa made a public pronouncement in which he told his people that they need not fear; he knew of a way the enemy could be defeated without bloodshed.

Tilopa went out to defend his country. The army marching against his kingdom was great in number and intent upon victory. Alone, Tilopa approached the forest where the army was encamped. When the soldiers saw him approach, they prepared to charge; Tilopa instantly transformed all the trees in the forest into soldiers ready to follow his command. When Tilopa ordered, “Look at the enemy!” all the trees that were transformed into soldiers gazed at the enemy. When Tilopa ordered, “Charge!” they all ran toward the enemy. Since there were uncountable trees, the trees were transformed into uncountable soldiers whose numbers were so frightening that the enemy fled the country without a battle. In this way, Tilopa’s prediction to his people, that he could defeat the enemy without bloodshed, came to pass.



Next, Tilopa went to the northern part of the country to practice the Dharma. There he obtained teachings from the *dakinis* and went to meditate in a cave. After making a commitment to meditate there for twelve years, he chained both his legs together so he would not be able to come out of the cave. In this way he meditated for twelve years.

After twelve years passed, the chains that were tied around Tilopa’s legs broke of themselves; he had achieved some realization as a result of his diligent meditation but had not yet accomplished the ultimate realization of Vajradhara. He wished to go out and wander and lead the simple life of a siddha.

However, the *dakinis* were hesitant to let Tilopa leave his cave and his practice. As it was not proper for him to disobey, he thought he would try to influence them by demonstrating his realization. He picked up a fish in his hand and transferred its consciousness out of its body. The *dakinis* witnessing

this saw that he was a highly realized being and gave him permission to wander as a simple siddha, just as he wished. His goal was to travel to the eastern part of Bengal and find Nagarjuna.

When Tilopa was abiding in a certain cave, Nagarjuna sent the *dakini* Matongha to give him teachings. When Matongha appeared, Tilopa inquired about Nagarjuna and was told that Nagarjuna was not in the human realm at that time but was giving teachings in the god realm. Matongha also told Tilopa that Nagarjuna knew Tilopa would be in this particular cave and had sent her to give him teachings.

As Nagarjuna requested, Tilopa received teachings from Matongha. During this time, Matongha noticed that because Tilopa had been king and of royal caste, his mind possessed a strong pride that hindered his progress, and she told him that his arrogance must be removed. Tilopa was given instructions to go to a certain village to seek out a woman there who was a prostitute and to work for her. The woman worked during the day making oil out of sesame seed and worked at night as a prostitute. As he was instructed, he worked for the woman during the day by pounding sesame seed, and during the night by soliciting her customers. In this way Tilopa lived as the prostitute’s helper.

One day as Tilopa was pounding sesame seeds in the village, he realized ultimate Buddhahood, the Vajradhara aspect of enlightenment. As a sign of his achieving complete realization, Tilopa levitated to the height of seven royal palm trees while still holding a mortar and pestle in his hands and continuing to grind sesame seeds. The news that Tilopa hovered in the air at the height of seven royal palm trees quickly spread through the village.

When the prostitute who employed Tilopa heard that someone was levitating very high in the sky, she hastened to see who it was. To her surprise she discovered that it was her employee in the sky, and that he was still working for her, even as he hovered, by continuing to grind sesame seeds with a mortar and pestle. She felt ashamed to have given such work to a highly realized being, and with great regret, she confessed this to Tilopa and requested him to accept her as his student. As she mentally made this request, Tilopa threw a flower down to her from the sky. The flower hit her on the head, instantaneously causing her to reach complete realization. She then levitated to the same height as Tilopa.

So once again, the news went out and quickly spread among a great number of people. When the news reached the king, he went out himself to witness the blessed event along with

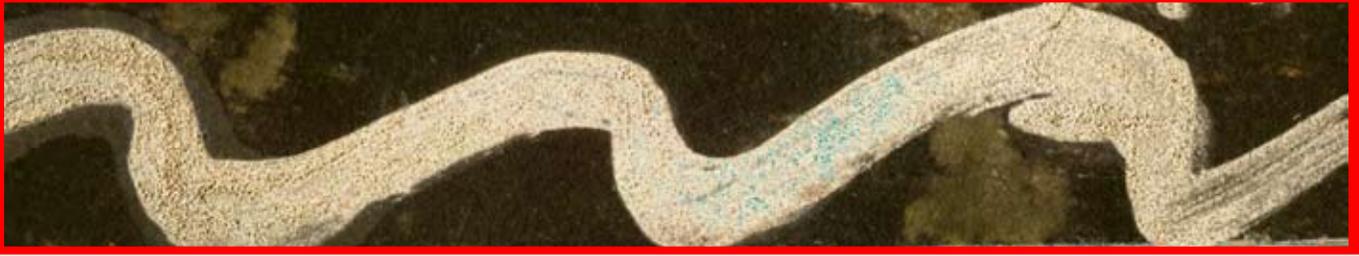
all his people. With everyone assembled below, Tilopa sang a song of the Dharma, using the example of the sesame seed in his teaching. In his song, Tilopa explained that although a sesame seed contains oil, it cannot produce oil by itself; without the hard work of grinding the seed, the oil cannot be extracted. So although Buddhature is within every living being, without the hard work of practicing the Dharma, there is no way to realize our inherent Buddhature.

As Tilopa sang this song, the king and all his people immediately understood his teaching and came to complete realization. At the instant of their enlightenment, the village appeared to be momentarily empty of all its inhabitants.

After that day, Tilopa became very famous. His great renown came about not only because of his profound realization, but also because, as he sang in many of his songs, he had no human guru. This was to show that he had received his transmission directly from the Vajradhara aspect of enlightenment.



*Born in Eastern Tibet in 1924, **Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche** is one of the great masters of the Karma Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Rinpoche, who received most of his training and education in Tibet before the Chinese invasion, is highly accomplished in meditation, philosophy, and monastic arts. After the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1959, Rinpoche escaped to India. He served as abbot of Tashi Choling Monastery in Bhutan and then at Tilokpur Nunnery in Northern India. In 1976, the 16th Karmapa sent Rinpoche to the United States to serve as his chief representative in this country. Today Rinpoche is the abbot of Karma Triyana Dharmachakra Monastery in Woodstock, New York, and head of its affiliate centers throughout the United States: www.kagyuu.org*



WALKING MEDITATION: A Pragmatic Approach



by Venerable Sujiva

The Nature of Mindfulness

Before introducing walking meditation, we should take a moment to become better acquainted with the nature of mindfulness. There are many factors in mindfulness.

The first factor is clarity of mind. It is a mind that is clear and pure—clear from all greed, anger, dullness and hallucination. When there is greed or craving, anger or hatred, delusion or dullness, the mind is not clear. When, for example, a person is angry and loses his temper, or is clinically anxious and depressed, would you think his mind is clear? No, his mind is not clear. His mind is heavy, dark,

agitated, dull and ignorant. So mindfulness is a state of mind when you are very alert; only then is the mind clear and undisturbed. This is called clarity of mind—it is like clear water; it is like clear sky.

The second factor of the nature of mindfulness is stability, calmness and peace. Let us compare the opposites: when a person's mind is experiencing anger, it is anxiety-laden—not calm, not stable. It is agitated like boiling water. When the mind is experiencing craving, it is excited and disturbed, not calm and steady. When the mind is not calm, peaceful and steady, it is confused and dull. The

HOW WILL WE
MOVE AROUND IN
THIS WORLD IF WE
ARE MINDFUL?
WE MOVE ABOUT
HAPPILY,
CALMLY
AND
EFFICIENTLY.

mind that is calm, peaceful and steady is just like when we first come out from a deep meditation or good sleep—we have no worries. It is just like when we are strolling on the beach or when we sit at home with a good book. Our mind then is calm and steady although it is not to the level that we would get in meditation. When we are already in a state of calmness, steadiness, and peacefulness,

should someone scold us, we remain calm and not disturbed. When this happens, the state of mindfulness is peaceful, happy and stress-free.

It is the nature of mindfulness that when clarity of mind, stability, calmness and peace have been achieved, a third factor may come into play.

The third factor is alertness of the mind. The mind becomes sensitive, not in a bad way, but sensitive in a good way. Being sensitive in a bad way is when somebody says something that is annoying and we become disturbed. Being sensitive in a good way is when a person is very calm, alert and stable but

very perceptive about what is going on. One knows exactly in detail and in great clarity what is actually happening. Please bear in mind this quality of mindfulness. Think about what the state of mindfulness is like when you are having it. When we are able to know that this quality is in the mind, we can safely say that we are mindful.

There is another type of mindfulness which is like a light, like an awareness that is concentrated within us, in our own mind and body processes. The main aim of insight meditation is to look within and discover our own natures. Because we do not understand what our own natures are, defilements such as greed, anger and delusion, and all suffering, arise.

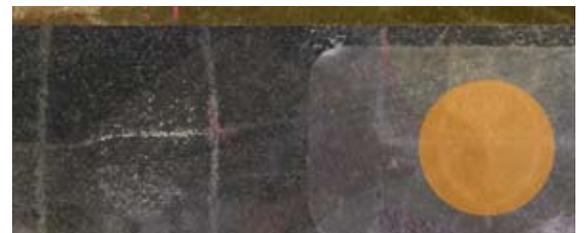
There are certain special qualities connected with mindfulness in insight meditation. First, it is not-thinking. We do not think, we just

observe. This does not mean that we do not think at all. We still think, but we are mindful of the thinking. However, in the actual meditation exercise, the thinking is put aside, and the mind with concentrated awareness observes without thinking, the mind is kept to the present or to present occurrences. We do not go to the past or future. We keep the mind in the so-called present and observe what is happening to our meditation object. When we can do that, then our mindfulness is concentrated precisely on what is happening to our meditation object.

In brief, the qualities of mindfulness are

1. The mind is clear, without greed, anger, or delusion. The mind should be clear of all confusion and agitation.
2. The mind is stable, calm, undisturbed, and peaceful.
3. Having made our mind clear, calm, stable and undisturbed, we then make the awareness sharp and sensitive. When the awareness is sharp and sensitive, we then direct it precisely at our meditation object. When we can direct our awareness repeatedly at our meditation object, all the while knowing what is happening at the present moment, then the process of insight development arises.

How will we move around in this world if we are mindful? We move about happily, calmly, and efficiently. Through practice we are developing not only the mindfulness that is operating in the world; we are trying to develop something more than that, although eventually it will also bring about such a state in the world.



Walking Meditation

Beginners are usually advised to do more walking than sitting. One teacher remarked that walking should precede every sitting. He also pointed out that Arahatsip can be gained by just walking alone. Meditators have confirmed that after a good walking meditation session, they have a better sitting session. One should not underestimate the importance of walking meditation. To just sit and neglect walking will make one like a lameman, walking on one leg! Walking serves many purposes in Vipassana. First, one is unable to sit all the time and walking very mindfully bridges what would otherwise be termed as wide gaps or periods of non-mindfulness in our meditation.

Continuity of mindfulness has always been stressed, since otherwise, the concentration needed to develop inside cannot arise.

Second, by itself, walking is also Vipassana Bhavana (cultivation of insight). Every step is watched in detail. Also, it is the mind that directs the walking. “There is no one that walks...”—this knowledge will come naturally as the meditator conscientiously notes the ever-vanishing phenomena of physical and mental processes. Walking has different characteristics from the sitting practice. Its objects are grosser and varied and so mindfulness can be built easier. As such, it acts as a powerful balancing factor in that it keeps one’s mind inclined toward Vipassana instead of Samatha (tranquility meditation). In walking, we also note “turning,” “seeing,” “hearing,” “intending,” and this extends the practice of mindfulness into our daily activities.

Walking meditation is noted in an increasing number of phases in order to step up mindfulness and concentration. One is advised to adopt a pace that one feels most comfortable with. One should be careful not to put the cart before the horse. Mindfulness is more important than the number of phases being noted. Once mindfulness is built up, the walking is slowed down by observing more phases, or rather, more phenomena. The beginner trying to do very slow walking can end up too tense because he is trying to watch something he can hardly perceive.

A meditator (whether beginner or veteran) should start his walking session with brisk steps. Brisk walking will help the mind get “accustomed” to the object. It also exercises the limbs and overcomes lethargy. Then again, there are those who “overdo” it by walking more briskly than is necessary and for too extended a period. They can end up quite distracted and exhausted. “Brisk enough to just arouse mindfulness” should be the pace.

As one’s practice advances, the walking processes are seen as a stream of mind and matter passing away in rapid succession. Walking would then be naturally very slow.

Walking may again be done in a relaxed or intense manner depending on whether energy is excessive or lacking. This is where the balancing of faculties comes in.

Other phenomena that are also watched during walking are sound, pain, intentions, seeing and hearing. One stops walking to note these if they are persistent and predominant, as explained further down in this article.



The Purpose of this Practice

During meditation, especially an extended period of meditation at a retreat, when all our energy and aim is directed to the realization of what is happening within us, within our mind and body processes, that’s the time when we get the most benefit from our practice. Whether it is walking meditation, our focus here, or sitting, standing or lying meditation, the purpose of the practice is:

- To keep the mind in the present moment
- To keep mindfulness clear, calm, and in its present moment
- To see what is happening to our meditation object

In walking meditation, the object of mindfulness is the walking process.

Types of Walking

Generally speaking, there are three types of walking meditation:

- Brisk (fast) walking
- Moderate walking
- Slow (kinhin) walking

Brisk Walking

Brisk walking is a walk that is faster than our normal walk. It can be extended to almost a full run. When we perform brisk walking, we just keep our mind on our footstep. To keep our mind on the footstep, we can say mentally “right, left, right, left...” or “stepping, stepping, stepping...” Usually walking is done in a straight line, covering not to great a distance. At the end of the walking path, we turn.

Walking has different characteristics from the sitting practice. Its objects are grosser and varied, so mindfulness can be built more easily.

Sometimes, if we feel sleepy, brisk walking is useful. In long retreats, brisk walking is sometimes used as an exercise because of the long hours of sitting. After doing brisk walking for five or ten minutes, we can then change to a moderate walk.

Moderate Walking and Moderately Slow Walking

In the insight tradition, most walking is done at a moderate pace. First, we must be aware of our standing posture. The standing posture is a good grounding to bring our mindfulness down to our feet. When we are standing, take a deep breath and relax. Relaxation is one of the first steps to arousing mindfulness. When we are tense, we cannot relax and be mindful. When we know that our body is relaxed, let our mind be clear, without any thinking. Just keep the mind calm, clear and

mentally relaxed.

During walking meditation our eyes are downcast but not looking down. Our eyelids are half-closed when we are relaxed. Only when we really want to look at something do we look straight ahead. Otherwise when we are relaxed, our eyes are downcast.

When the eyes are downcast, the eyes are not looking at what is on the floor. We are not focusing on anything because our awareness is brought to the soles of our feet. When we bring the awareness from the head to the soles of the feet, we will know that the body is standing erect and firm. We can say in our mind “standing, standing ...” and at the same time be aware of the whole body. We have to make sure the we have the real awareness which has been described earlier—clear, steady, calm, very alert and sensitive to the sensation of the body standing. Then we bring the awareness to the soles of the feet. This awareness is like a light shining precisely onto a spot. We keep our mind very calm and sensitive, clear and alert, and then we direct the awareness—make it rightly aimed. We will feel, with the sole of the feet on the ground, the sensations there—which may be weight, texture, heat, coolness or just clear awareness.

When we feel a lot of sensations, we normally take them for granted. We need to focus our awareness on the sensations. All these sensations are basic experiences before the other form of thought processes—the idea of who we are, what we are, what is happening around us—begins. When we know these sensations, we think about them and then the mind creates concepts like a “self” based on them. Therefore, sensations are a more basic form of experience and existence, the beginning before all complicated things arise.

When we have become aware of the sensations, we then start walking—right step, left step, right step, left step—saying in our minds “right step, left step, right step, left step.” Mentally saying “right step, left step” helps us keep our minds on the object; otherwise we will start thinking.

Usually the hands are folded in front of or at the back of the body. The feet should not be lifted too high; otherwise you will not be stable. The space between our feet should not be too far apart. The

pace of walking should be moderately slow and you should just take steps that are half the normal distance. When you move more slowly, you will find are somewhat parallel to the ground. You do not have to purposely lift you leg high. When the body shifts forward, the heel automatically turns up; you do not have to turn your heel to the maximum, only slightly.

Then push the foot forward and step down.

The stepping down should be leveled, like a slow natural walk. Make sure that you are mindful, clear, stable, peaceful, and very alert, aiming precisely at what is happening at the footstep. It may seem a very simple process, but the mind is really unruly. It may not be focused at the foot for long before it goes somewhere else—thinking, or it becomes dull and there is no more mindfulness.



Thinking During Walking Meditation

There are two types of thinking:

- We know that we are thinking. Once we know that we are thinking, the thinking goes away. In this case, we do not have to stop walking
- We know that we are thinking but we are unable to stop thinking. In this case, we have to stop and say in our mind “thinking, thinking...” When we are aware of the thinking, it will go away. When the thinking goes away, we are aware again. Then we can bring our mind to the sole of the feet and start once again.

Sometimes, during a period of walking, thinking that you are unable to stop will arise many times and so you may have to stop walking many times. Another thing that can happen is boredom. As we walk, we may start looking around. When we find ourselves looking around, we must say mentally, “looking, looking.” When we find that we are not doing what we should be doing, we stand still and bring the mind back to “standing,

standing” and start all over. Once we find ourselves losing mindfulness, we should stand and balance ourselves with mindfulness and start all over. This is like a surfer who falls off his board into the waves of worldly phenomena and then stops, gets back on the board and reestablishes his balance.

At certain times the mind tends to be very disturbed. Even when we stop and mentally say “thinking, thinking...” the mind still thinks. In this case, we have to resort to the fast walking “right,left,right,left...” keeping a continuous pace.

Observation in Walking Meditation

Once we get into the feel of it and there is no more thinking, the mind follows a certain rhythm. When the mind follows a certain rhythm and pace of walking, it is easier to follow the process. It is just like when we are dancing, we get into the rhythm of the dance. We will find the mind following our walking at a certain pace—at a certain rhythm—comfortably, and if we keep at it, the awareness and the concentration will build up. Thus, there are three processes here:

1. Arousing the Awareness—We tell ourselves to relax and clear our mind; to be mindful of what is happening every time we think, even if the mind is dull and wandering. When we think, or when the mind is dull and wanders, it means we are not mindful, so we need to bring back the awareness and stabilize ourselves
2. Following the Object--Once our mindfulness is aroused, we follow the object with awareness—the footsteps “right, left, right, left...” Unlike shooting a fixed target, this is more like shooting a moving object—like a video camera following movement.
3. Observation--Once we can follow the object over a period of time, we come to the third phase of meditation—the actual phase of insight meditation—observation. If we cannot follow the object properly, the observation cannot be done very well.

During this third phase of meditation, observation of the walking must be done at a much slower

pace. Here, we are observing the sensation, eg, when we lift our hind foot, there is a feeling of a pulling force. How this is being experienced will depend on how clear and sharp our mindfulness is. At the point when our foot starts lifting, what is the sensation like? When the muscles pull, can we feel the tension? Or do we just feel the lifting movement. We do not choose what to experience. We just direct our mind onto the object and allow our mind to pick up the experience.

When we lift our leg, we mentally say “lifting, lifting” and we observe the lifting sensations. When we push, we mentally say “pushing, pushing” and we note the pushing sensation. The pushing sensation is like when we push our cart in the supermarket. What does the pushing feel like? Of course it might feel a bit heavier after a meal, but if our mind feels light then the movement is faster and we feel only the pushing sensation.

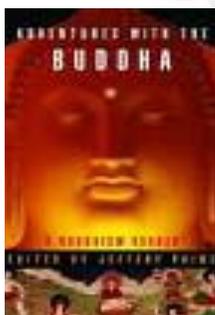
When we step, we mentally say “stepping, stepping” and feel the stepping sensations. When we put our foot down, there is a relaxing sensation. Therefore, as we put our foot down, touching the floor, we can feel the sensations of the sole again. We follow each step—the sequence or the series of processes of the sensations—happening from the calf to the sole. It is here that we begin to discover what is happening before the conceptualizations take place.

It is the reality that is happening within us all.

Venerable Sujiva is a Malaysian Chinese monk who has dedicated his life to the Buddha's teachings, with special emphasis on meditation, especially Vipassana Meditation. He earned a Bachelors degree in Buddhist studies and has studied under some of the most renowned teachers in Malaysia, Thailand and Burma (Myanmar), including the Venerable Sayadaw U Panditabhivamsa at the famed Mahasi Buddhist Meditation Centre in Rangoon. He is an internationally respected meditation teacher, having taught in Asia, Australia, Europe, and the United States. He has authored several books on meditation and his two hobbies: the Abhidharma and Buddhist poetry. He currently resides in the European Community.



FROM OUR BOOKSHELVES



BEST OF THE BESTS

Adventures with the Buddha

Edited by Jeffrey Paine

Reviewed by Xianyang Carl Jerome

In the world of Buddhist books today, anthologies are hot. There are Theravada Buddhist anthologies, anthologies of Buddhist poetry, anthologies of North American Buddhist verse, socially engaged Buddhist anthologies, anthologies of and for young people, anthologies of and for post-adolescents, and publisher's anthologies and annuals and bests-of. Some are a well done, some are little forced, others are somewhat self-indulgent, and a few are a clearly self-serving. But none are bad.

One of these anthologies, however, is exceptional, and stands above the rest for its cohesiveness, its literary worth, and the richness of its content. Jeffrey Paine, the editor, has assembled into this collection the adventures of nine Westerners Buddhist enthusiasts who travel to China, Tibet, Nepal, India and Japan on their spiritual quests. They write of their travels with such depth and understanding and beauty that they transport us into their adventures. Discover the magic and the mystery, the wit and the pain of Tibet As It Once Was with Alexandra David-Neel and The Lost World of Chinese Buddhism with John Blofeld. Sit through a sesshin, sigh deeply and laugh hard when it ends, in Reality in a Zen Monastery with Janwillem van de Wetering, and go on a life threatening retreat in An African-American Woman's Journey into Buddhism with Jan Willis (and Lama Yeshe).

This anthology sheds new light on Buddhism and offers new perspectives and rare glimpses into Buddhist practice from the women and men who are shaping and defining, directly and indirectly, American Buddhism today—women and men who are inspiring and elevating the culture of our Buddhist centers and universities. Travel with them to different times and spaces, share in their explorations, and come back to your own practice enriched by their exploits and escapades.

Here are three short excerpts from three of the adventures.

“By some mischance, I arrived very late for the rites which were to culminate in the initiation of twenty-six Chinese laymen and myself into the higher mysteries of Tibetan Buddhism. It took place in the large guest-hall of the Tibetan's house. All the usual furniture had been removed and the ground covered with carpets for sitting on. To one side of the room sat the candidates for initiation, crosslegged and upright, but relaxed. They looked grave and even stately in their long ceremonial robes of white cotton. Facing them at a distance was a very low table furnished with various ritual objects. I noticed that the incense-sticks had been laid horizontally upon a bed of ash in an oblong burner, instead of being planted vertically according to the Chinese custom. There were seven miniature silver bowls of pure water mystically symbolizing the treasures of the universe, and a row of finely wrought silver butter-lamps, which gleamed amid the pagoda-shaped tormas kneaded from butter flour.

Cross-legged on his cushion behind this altar sat the Rimpoche. He was wearing the “eight-petalled-lotus” hat to symbolize the spiritual forces that would descend through him upon the initiates. His personal followers, now clad like the Rimpoche in the dull ecclesiastical robes of the Gelugpa (Yellow-Hat) Sect, were ranged two on each side of him. I observed these details from the doorway while I was drawing over my ordinary clothes a long ceremonial robe with butterfly-wing sleeves. I glanced with some interest at the faces of my friends. A few of them were watching with expressions of detachment like observers taking a purely scientific or aesthetic interest in the rites; I saw no indication of the mingled rapture and amazement of people overwrought by revivalist eloquence; nor were there signs of the terrible soul-searing remorse engendered by reminding people of their inherent wickedness, of the grim doctrine of original sin. Equally, I failed to discover any suggestion of self-complacency or of spiritual pride in being thus uniquely honored by a high dignitary of the Buddhist Church. Rather their

faces seemed to have borrowed and intensified Tahai's habitual expressions of outward alertness and inward calm. I recalled, now, that the Rimpoche, had promised only to endow them with what he called “seeds” (potentials which must be developed according to precise rules and over a period of years before they could be found spiritually stimulating.) This very gradual process of fruition must depend entirely upon the efforts of each individual.

With my gown carefully adjusted, I prostrated myself three times in the direction of the Rimpoche. Then, as unobtrusively as possible, I crawled to a vacant space in the last row of almost motionless, white-gowned figures. The rites, which must have begun an hour or so before my arrival, continued without pause for so long that I lost all sense of time. Chiefly they consisted of sonorous Tibeto-Sanskrit chants intoned by the deep voiced lamas, impressive but incomprehensible, accompanied by the roll of twirling hand-drums from which clappers depended on silken cords. A profoundly hypnotic effect was produced by the glittering points of the flame reflected on burnished silver, the low-pitched hum or growl of the belly deep chanting, the harsh clack-clack-clack-clack-clack of the hand-drums, and sometimes by the weaving of the Rimpoche's slender fingers in and out of the long, rapid successions of mudras. Though, to one ignorant of the words, the ceremony held little variety, I do not think any of us were burdened by a sense of monotony. I, myself, was perfectly happy and at peace until the arrival of cramp-pains in my legs. Surreptitiously I wiggled my feet and raised and lowered my knees beneath the folds of my gown. The nearly motionless calm of all the others filled me with envy.”

From Janwillen van de Wetering's *Reality In A Zen Monastery*:

“I sat on the little staircase leading down into the garden from my room, smoked and looked about and saw the ornamental fir trees, cut and guided into enchanting shapes, now lightly covered with a thin layer of snow: a miraculous and beautiful view. I had said something about it to the head monk who happened to pass by and he had stopped for a moment, looked politely at the indicated trees, and had admitted dryly that they were beautiful. “Just like a picture!”

His remark annoyed me. “Just like a picture.” What an inane thing to say. Limited, bourgeois. And this was supposed to be an enlightened man in whom satori, the lightening of sudden real insight, should have taken place at least several times, for he had finished his koan study.

A Zen koan exists which asks why Bodhidharma, the first Zen master, went to China: a symbolic question, an essential question, a question in the order of “What is the essence of Buddhism?” the answer which one Zen master accepted was: “The fir tree in the temple garden.” Just a tree, like the tree standing here in front of me. Because a tree shows the perfect beauty in which everything else is expressed, and especially the essence of Buddhism and the reason of Bodhidharma’s long wanderings through a strange country. But if I were to say to the master that the truth of everything, the purpose of life, is expressed in a tree, he would pick up his bell and ring me out of the room or he would grunt and shake his head.

And that was why I had come, to visit an old Japanese gentleman who ridiculed everything I said or could say, and to sit still for fifteen hours a day on a mat, for seven days on end, while the monks whacked me on the back with a four-foot long lath made of strong wood.

I cursed softly. What on earth was wrong with me? Why couldn’t I live normally and do my best, like my brothers and sisters, like my father had

always done? My grandmother, whom I never knew, would have said that one mustn’t break one’s head about questions which cannot be answered. My mother had asked her what exists outside the universe. “If you come to the end of the universe,” my grandmother said, “you will see that everything has been pasted over with newspapers.” An intelligent answer, which had satisfied my mother. Why couldn’t I be content with an endless wall, built of wooden lathe work and pasted over with the New Rotterdam Herald?”

From Tsultrim Allione’s
In Search of Women’s Wisdom:

“In June 1967, when I was nineteen, my friend from the University of Colorado and spiritual sister, Victress Hitchcock, and I flew from San Francisco to Hong Kong to join her parents, who were in the diplomatic corps in Calcutta. We traveled by boat from Hong Kong to Bombay, and there we were taken ashore by small boats, which left us at the bottom of a long flight of wide stone steps. As I walked up these steps I felt that I had finally arrived in a place where I could find true wisdom.

We stayed with Victress’s parents in Calcutta for the monsoon. Her father was the Consul General in Calcutta and his wife, Maxine, arranged for us to work as volunteers at Mother Teresa’s “Orphanage and Home for Unwed Mothers.” They hoped that this kind of work would get the fantasies of the “Mystic East” out of our heads and set us on a more acceptable path, but then they sent us to Kathmandu to work with Tibetan refugees.

One day, as we were exploring the upper stories of a house in Kathmandu, we went out onto the balcony, and in the distance I saw a small hill at

the top of which was a white dome topped by a golden spire. It looked like something from a fairy tale, glittering invitingly in the bright sunlight. We were told that this was called “The Monkey Temple” as it was inhabited by wild monkeys; but its real name was Swayambhu, which means “self-sprung.” This small hilltop with a cluster of Temples and a huge Tibetan stupa is sacred to both the Nepalese and the Tibetans. We were told that during the summer there were predawn processions from Kathmandu to Swayambhu and we decided to try to get up early enough to join one of these.

We rose the next day long before dawn and, when we stumbled bleary-eyed into the streets, we joined in a very bizarre parade consisting of Nepalese of all ages screaming songs and making noise with anything they had on hand from battered trumpets to tin drums. We were told that all this noise was to wake up the gods so that they would not forget to make the rice grow. We walked through the narrow stone and dirt streets of the city over a bridge and then up to the base of the hill, where we began a steep ascent.

We staggered up the hundreds of stone steps hardly aware of the ancient stone Buddhas, prayer flags and wild monkeys that surrounded us. It was beginning to be hot even at that hour. We were breathless and sweating as we stumbled up the last steep steps and practically fell upon the biggest vajra (thunderbolt scepter) that I have ever seen. Behind this vajra was the vast, round, white dome of the stupa, like a full solid skirt, at the top of which were two giant Buddhas eyes wisely looking out over the peaceful valley which was just beginning to come alive.

We wandered around this stupa amidst the singing, banging Nepalese and the humming Tibetans who were circumambulating the stupa spinning the prayer wheels which line the lower portion of the round dome.

We were just catching our breath when several six-foot-long horns emerged from the adjacent Tibetan monastery and started to make an unbelievable sound. It was a long, deep, whirring, haunting wail that takes you out somewhere beyond the highest Himalayan peaks and at the same time back into your mother’s womb.

I was so moved by this place that I took a small hut on the neighboring hill, Kimbol...”

Jeffrey Paine is a distinguished editor and author. He was for many years literary editor of the Wilson Quarterly; he has judged the Pulitzer Prize and been vice president of the National Book Critics Circle. He is author of Father India: Westerners Under the Spell of an Ancient Culture. Paine lives in Washington, D.C.



Dharma in the Moment

The duty of humans is to teach humans to be human.

Ajahn Luangpor Teean



You can observe a lot by watching.

Yogi Berra

Our deeds determine us as much as we determine our deeds.

---George Elliot



Trying to define yourself is like trying to bite your own teeth.

--Alan Watts

"...but, my dear, you've had the power to go home all along."

Glinda, the Good Witch of the North



The whole world is with you, yet you keep thinking there is something else.

-- Anonymous



Dizang Hall: A final resting place for your loved ones

As you face the altar in Chan Temples and monasteries around the world, the regally depicted statue on the left of the Buddha is DiZang. Since the Tang Dynasty in the 7th century, when the first translations of the Sutra of The Great Vows of Ksitigarbha (DiZang) Bodhisattva were made, DiZang has held a special place in the hearts of Chinese Buddhists. The Sutra describes how DiZang became a bodhisattva by making great vows to rescue sentient beings, vowing never to leave the hell realms until every being there had been saved.

In building DiZang Hall, it was the aspiration and intention of MABA's Sangha to provide a serene, tranquil, and secure setting for those who have passed on, where the deceased and the living will feel the peace of the Pure Land and the presence of DiZang Pusa.

For those who wish to express their traditional familial piety, or for those who wish to feel the comfort of knowing that they will reside after death under the mindful eye of a Buddhist Sangha, the Mid-America Buddhist Association provides a variety of services, including pre-need reservations and allocation, as well as interment and burial services.

**For information in English, please contact
Xianyang Carl Jerome at
(312) 881-0177;**

**for information in Chinese, please contact
Venerable Kongzheng at
(636) 482-4037;**



MABA

The Mid-America Buddhist Association

MABA is a Chan Buddhist monastery located on 60-acres of secluded woodland in the rolling hills of Missouri, about 45 minutes west of St. Louis. It is MABA's mission to provide a practice environment for its members and supporters with a monastic community to propagate the Dharma.

The monastery includes a Meditation Hall with a library and communal dining and activity room. There is a Nun's residence built from the original 18th-century farmhouse on the land, a "Tea House" named Kong Hut which can be used for private retreats, a guest residence called "The Red Barn," a Guan Yin Pavilion sited just above the lake which serve as a reminder of the beauty we find in a life of compassion, and Dizang Memorial Hall, which was completed in 2006 to provide a final resting place for those seeking to inter their loved ones under the watchful eye of a Buddhist Sangha.

With the guidance and leadership of its Abbot, Master Ji Ru, MABA has developed programs that include weekly meditation and Dharma talks, as well as periodic one, three, and fourteen-day retreats. Retreats are led by Master Ji Ru or other world renowned Buddhist Teachers. There are also weekly classes in Buddhist studies for beginners, intermediate, and advanced students, as well as a summer program for youths. And for those wanting to do a private retreat, whether a weekend, a week, or more, MABA can provide accommodations and a practice environment for you. Rightview Quarterly and Rightview Online are a part of MABA's practice and mission.

We invite you to visit MABA and to subscribe to Rightview Quarterly. You can participate online in your practice or learn about Buddhism at RightviewOnline.org.

For more information about any of our practices or programs please email info@maba-usa.org

For information about Rightview Quarterly or Rightview Online please email info@RightviewOnline.org



We provide Rightview Quarterly without cost. No offering is required for you to subscribe. If you can make a donation to support the continued publication of the magazine, know that it is deeply appreciated. The merit of your contribution is what allows us to continue our practice for the benefit of all beings.

TO SUBSCRIBE AND/OR MAKE AN OFFERING ON-LINE:

Go to www.maba-usa.org

Click on RIGHTVIEW QUARTERLY on the left of the screen.

Follow the directions to make an offering by credit card through Paypal.

TO SUBSCRIBE AND/OR MAKE AN OFFERING BY CHECK:

Complete the form below.

Make your check payable to Mid-America Buddhist Association.

Mail to: **RIGHTVIEW QUARTERLY**

MABA
299 Heger Lane
Augusta, MO 63332-1445 USA

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

E-MAIL _____