

With a Bit of Humor

Jewels

**An Introduction to American Buddhism
for Youth, Scouts, and the Young at Heart**



Kenneth Kenshin Tanaka

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for Youth, Scouts and the Young at Heart**

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BDK America

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Cover photo: A peace march led by Thich Nhat Hanh and his young friends in downtown Los Angeles. Photo by Don Farber.

*To Buddhist youth and young adults
on whose shoulders the future of
American Buddhism rests*

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Preface

Coming of Age of Buddhism in America

Let's begin by sharing a funny cartoon that I once saw in a newspaper.¹

A Christian person walking on a busy city sidewalk is carrying a placard that reads:

“Jesus is coming!”

Behind him there is a Buddhist monk, smiling and carrying a placard of his own that reads:

“Buddha HERE NOW!”

This symbolizes, for me, the coming of age of Buddhism as an *American* religion. This Buddhist is proudly—and even in a challenging manner—expressing Buddhist teaching on an *equal* footing with the Christian.

1. “San Francisco Examiner,” in July 1987. The wording is the same, but the cartoon was newly created for this book.



Further, over 30 million people or one-tenth of the population in America are either Buddhists, Buddhist sympathizers, or have been strongly influenced by Buddhism.²

Challenges of Being a Young Buddhist

However, this was not always the case. For me, growing up Buddhist in America in the early 1960s was not easy. There were very few Buddhists around, and many Americans looked down on Buddhism as some Asian cult where followers meditated by staring at each other's belly buttons!

At school I was uncomfortable doing the daily reciting of the “Pledge of Allegiance,” when we came to the phrase “one nation under God.” Why? It was because

2. See the “Buddhist Population” section in Chapter One.

there was no such “God” in Buddhism. Starting in the eighth grade, I began to try various ways to deal with that dilemma: 1) keeping *silent* when we came to the word “God,” 2) silently replacing “Buddha” for “God,” and 3) saying “God” aloud but rationalizing “God” to carry a broader meaning to include the Buddha.

So, it was not easy being a young Buddhist back then. Fortunately, things have changed enormously since then. Buddhism is today much more well known, and, as I will show in this book, it is now an “American religion” and no longer just a religion of Asia. Further, there are now far more “famous” Buddhists, great books on Buddhism, and information available on the Internet.

A Book for Youth and Young Adults

Despite this, I feel there are very few introductory books for American youths and young adults on Buddhism. That motivated me to work on an easy to understand introductory book for this audience. I feel I can accomplish this because of my own background of having been an American Buddhist *youth*. Plus, I have raised three Buddhist young adults.

It is my strong wish to contribute to the well-being of American youth who are Buddhists or interested in Buddhism. Despite the growth of Buddhism in this country, there are still many challenges of living in a society dominated by Christian and, to some extent, Jewish values and customs. For example, many of our politicians take oaths of office by placing their hands on the Bible and often end their speeches with “May God bless America.”

Buddhism comes in many forms, for there are hundreds of denominations from numerous countries of Asia. What is fascinating about American Buddhism is that Los Angeles and other large cities have more different kinds of Buddhist denominations than are found in any large city in Asia, including Bangkok, Taipei, Seoul, and Kyoto. For the first time in the 2,600 years of Buddhist history, *all* the major Buddhist denominations in the world today are co-existing in many of the largest American cities. It's exciting to be living in such a remarkable setting and time!

In this book, I have tried to find commonality among these multiple denominations by focusing on the *early* Buddhist teachings before the formation of denominations took place. By so doing, we are able to present a set of teachings and practices that are *common* to all the traditions. This book or any one book, for that matter, cannot cover and do justice to the distinct features of the many Buddhist denominations. For that, you are asked to consult the resources provided by each of the denominations.

Gratitude to the Scouts

This book pays special attention to the needs of the Scouts of America because it was the National Buddhist Committee on Scouting that initially asked me to write a book for the Scouts. I accepted the request, for I, too, was a Scout in my youth. I also wanted to show gratitude to the Scouts for the incredible experience that the organization gave me.

I grew up in a working-class section of a town in Northern California. Most of our parents were too busy working and had little time or money to take us on camping trips or to teach us much about the outdoors.

Fortunately, there were dedicated adults from the wealthier neighborhoods of the town, who contributed their time and money to serve as Scoutmasters and supporters. Because of their dedication, we were able to go on numerous camping trips to the mountains, including trips to the distant Sierra Nevada mountains that I will never forget.

Even though many years have passed since the early 1960s, I am forever grateful for the chance to have been a Scout. My fond memories of wearing the Scouts uniform, learning how to pitch a tent and benefitting from the leaders' genuine concern and selfless dedication gave me a lasting positive image and faith in my community, in society and, yes, in humanity!

Acknowledgements

Being of the Baby Boomer generation, I needed the eyes of the younger generation to look through the manuscript of this book. I was, therefore, so pleased when a group of younger generation responded to my request by offering valuable suggestions. So my heartfelt appreciation goes to Leah Chase, Harrison Chin, Joshua McKinney, Kelli and Sarah Matsumura, Naho Umitani, and Jason Yokoyama. With such committed and knowledgeable young people, I am even more hopeful for the future of American Buddhism.

I wish also to thank the members of the various communities that make up the kaleidoscope of American Buddhist traditions. Allow me to make special mention of those who gave me encouragement to pursue this book project: Rev. Tu Luc (Chua Pho Tu Temple–Vietnamese tradition), Rev. Bhante Seelawimala (Theravada–Sri Lankan tradition), Rev. Marvin Harada (Bishop, Buddhist Churches of America–Japanese Pure Land tradition), Rev. Ajahn Maha Prasert (Theravada–Thai tradition), Rev. Hozan Alan Senauke (Berkeley Zen Center–Zen tradition), and Rev. Dr. Heng Sure (Dharma Realm Buddhist Association–Chinese tradition).

I am indebted to Patricia Ikeda-Nash, a colleague and a trusted copy editor, for her superb editing of the manuscript of this book. A big “thank you” goes to my daughter, Serena Tamura, who took time from her demanding schedule as a Ph.D. student to support her father with editing, helping to bridge the age gap with the young readers of this book. My deep appreciation also goes to Ken Nakamura for his numerous suggestions based on his life-long career as a Dharma School teacher and a Scoutmaster. Gratitude is also owed to Jon Murakami of Hawaii for his cartoons and to Rev. Ken Sugahara, the head priest of Gonnenji Temple in Tokyo for his contribution with the graphics.

Also, I feel an enormous sense of gratitude to The Rev. Gyodo Kono Memorial Scholarship Fund and its selection committee for supporting me again as they have done with my previous publication projects. I am quite confident that their trust in this project will bear fruit in

keeping with their mission of informing the wider public about Buddhism.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the Society for the Promotion of Buddhism (or BDK America), which enthusiastically agreed to publish and distribute this book to any organization. This symbolizes the dream and the noble mission of Dr. Yehan Numata (1897–1994), the founder of BDK, who, a hundred years ago, began his lifelong effort to share the Buddhist teachings while still a young graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley.

And my last words of appreciation is reserved for Prof. George Tanabe, the President of BDK America, for his support in making *my* dream of producing a book for youth and young adults come true!

Introduction

The title of this book, *Jewels*, comes from the Buddhist teaching that sees all living beings as precious jewels. Each shining jewel is located where the strands cross one another in the vast web of the universe.

You and I, along with all beings, are like the jewels that are linked together to illuminate and reflect each other. So as one of the jewels in the net, I am connected to the millions of *outer* jewels that support and illuminate me.

Also, there lies within each one of us an *inner* jewel. It is waiting to shine forth to help us realize Awakening, the aim of Buddhism. In so doing, we will be able to overcome suffering (sadness, pain, anxiety, etc.) and to realize happiness (joy, satisfaction, peace of mind, gratitude, etc.) in this life.¹

So, the jewels symbolize the outer and the inner di-

1. “Suffering” is the main English translation of the Sanskrit word *duhkha*. In this book, suffering refers to “sadness, pain, anxiety, disappointment, worries, etc.” “Happiness” (*subkha* in Sanskrit) refers to the absence of suffering and the presence of Awakening, which manifests as joy, satisfaction, peace of mind, gratitude, etc.

mensions or conditions of our lives. Let us first look at the outer jewels.

Outer Jewels

The *outer* jewels are talked about in a well-known metaphor called the “Indra’s Net of Jewels” in a scripture called the *Flower Garland Sutra* and related writings.² I have expanded on the original version to make it more meaningful to young readers.

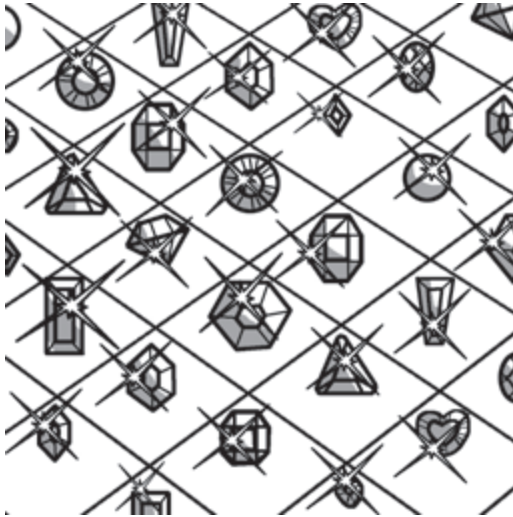
An expansive net extends endlessly throughout the universe in all four directions. At each “eye” of the net (where the warp and weft cross) hangs a shining jewel. Hence, countless jewels are found on the net and together form a galactic bed of shimmering jewels. It’s an *amazing* sight to behold!

Since each jewel is tied to the net, it is connected to all the other jewels. No jewel is left out. Each jewel feels especially connected to those jewels located nearby, for they are easily seen. However, a jewel is actually *connected* even to those unseen jewels located thousands or even billions of miles away.

Now, no jewel can shine by itself. It needs the light from the other jewels to shine. This relationship among the jewels is called “All for one,” for all the other jewels are involved in illuminating that one jewel.

On the other hand, a jewel does not just receive

2. This metaphor continued to be valued in China within the Huayan school of Buddhism and is now often cited by Buddhists in America and beyond.



light but also gives out light to illuminate the other jewels. Each jewel illuminates the nearby jewels with greater intensity but also illuminates those jewels located thousands of miles away no matter how faint the light might look. This relationship is called “One for all,” for that one jewel is actively involved in illuminating all the other jewels.

Hence, each jewel receives light in the “All for one” relationship and simultaneously sends out light in the “One for all” interaction. The jewels engage each other in a passive as well as in an active manner. They need each other and help each other. So, the jewels are mutually linked, interconnected, and interdependent.

The next important quality of the jewels is that each jewel is *unique*. Despite the countless number of jewels, no two are exactly the same. Every jewel is unique in its shape, size, color and texture. Some are diamond-shaped,

some are round or rectangular, and the rest are in every conceivable shape imaginable. The same goes for their size, color and texture. Some are small as a dewdrop, others as large as a baseball, and others are in between. The colors of some are the primary colors, red, green, and blue, while others are the secondary colors, yellow, magenta and cyan, and others are colors of various mixtures of primary and secondary. The textures vary from smooth to bumpy to jagged to everything in between and beyond. Even the light in each jewel differs in color, sheen and brightness.

So, based on this metaphor, each of us is one of these jewels. We are unique, yet dependent on others. We are dependent on others, yet can have influence on others. Such is the nature of our existence and our relationship with others, which includes our family, our friends, our community, the nation, the international community and the natural world.

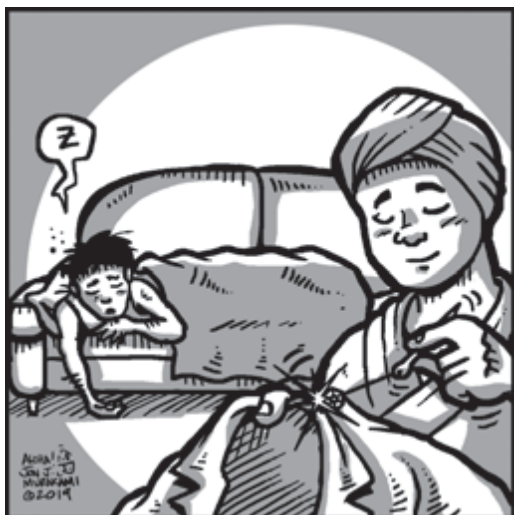
Yes, the importance of each jewel is acknowledged for its unique qualities and for its contribution to others. However, that is not all. Each jewel is also valued simply for *existing*. It has worth and value simply for existing and for being a part of this net of jewels.

Thus, the Buddhist teachings are ready to help each of us to come to fully realize and appreciate this reality as described by the metaphor and to contribute to greater happiness and peace for others and for ourselves. I believe this offers an *encouraging* and *positive* vision, inspiring us to face up to our problems and to live our lives to the fullest.

Inner Jewels

Let us now take a look at the *inner* jewels as told in a parable found in another scripture called the *Lotus Sutra*. A poor man visited the house of a close, rich friend. The friend wine and dined him with delicious food. The poor man had gotten drunk and he fell asleep. The rich friend had to go out on official business, but before leaving, the rich friend sewed a priceless jewel into the lining of his friend's clothes. Not noticing anything, the poor man woke up and set out on a journey to other countries.

The poor man did not make himself aim for a better life. So he earned little money and had to be satisfied with very little. It was a struggle to make ends meet. One day, by chance, he ran into his rich friend, who saw how hard life continued to be for his friend. The rich man told the poor friend that there was a priceless jewel that



had been in his clothing all along. In realizing that he was in possession of a priceless jewel, the poor man was overjoyed, for he was now rich enough to try to fulfill his dreams.

The priceless jewel that the poor man discovered is a symbol not necessarily of material but of *mental* and *spiritual* happiness. It symbolizes the potentiality that we all have to become a happier, wiser, and better person like the Buddha, the Awakened One. Everyone has the jewel within. So unlike in the story where the poor man failed to look within, we should now want to discover that precious jewel *on our own*. Let us grab it, polish it and let it shine forth!

“Jewels” also make up the Three Jewels or Three Treasures, which refer to Buddha (Awakened person), Dharma (the teachings), and Sangha (teachers or community of Buddhists). The Three Jewels make up a teaching that all Buddhist schools consider important because it makes up the object of ultimate reliance and respect. A person is considered to have become a “Buddhist” when one accepts the Three Jewels as the basic foundation of his or her life. So, “jewels” are immensely precious as a teaching and as a metaphor.

I hope that you have gained greater confidence and optimism from the metaphor and the story about the outer and inner jewels. It is now up to each of you to *open* your mind and heart to learn the basic teachings and practices.

An “open mind” is like a parachute, for it works best when it’s *opened*! So, let us get started.

Part One

Legacy

Chapter 1

Buddhism in America

Buddhism is Now an American Religion

Buddhism is one of the three major world religions. The other two are Christianity and Islam. These three qualify as “world” religions because they are found in large areas of the world and are not limited to one culture or one corner of the world.

In terms of number of followers, there are today 2.3 billion Christians, followed by 1.8 billion Muslims and 500 million Buddhists. In terms of history, Buddhism is the oldest, for it is about 500 years older than Christianity and 1,100 years older than Islam.

Many people still think of Buddhism only as an ancient religion of Asia. However, this view is changing. For example, Professor Diana Eck, an expert on contemporary American religions at Harvard University, declared in 1993, “Buddhism is now an *American* religion.”¹ Prof.

1. Video entitled, “Becoming the Buddha in L.A.” (WGBH Educational Foundation, 1993).

Eck made that statement because Buddhists have been in America since around 1850 and there are many more Buddhists now than ever before.²

Buddhist Population

Buddhists now make up about one percent of the entire American population, which means there are approximately 3.2 million Buddhists.³ This shows a phenomenal growth from around 200,000 in the mid-1970s, a 16-fold increase. During the same period, the number of Christians decreased from about 91 percent of the American population to about 65 percent.⁴ So, while Buddhism is still a small religion, it is one of the fastest growing religions in America.

Christianity is, of course, the largest religion at about 65 percent of the population. It is followed far behind by Judaism with about 2 percent who are Jewish. At one percent, Buddhists number about the same as the Muslims and the Hindus, whose numbers are both around one percent of the entire population. So, while

2. The Chinese Buddhists arrived in America for the Gold Rush and built the first temple in San Francisco in 1853. Further, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott became the first American to convert to Buddhism in 1880.

3. Pew Research Center. 2019 Report on Buddhists. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/05/5-facts-about-buddhists-around-the-world/>

4. Pew Research Center. 2019 Report on Christians in the U.S. <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

Christians are still the largest by far, the total percentage of non-Christians (Jewish, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, etc.) has increased to seven percent of the entire U.S. population.⁵

Interestingly, there are now a growing number of people who are not part of any religion. They now account for 26 percent of the entire population, and it's even higher among the younger people, close to 40 percent.⁶ This does not mean that they are not religious or do not believe in God, but they simply are not *affiliated* or go regularly to a church, synagogue, temple, mosque, or any religious organization.

Returning to our focus on the Buddhist religion, there are those who don't claim to be "Buddhist" but are keenly interested in the teachings and are even engaged in Buddhist practices, especially meditation. These people are called "sympathizers" or, sometimes, humorously referred to as "Nightstand Buddhists."⁷

They often attend more than one Buddhist temple or center and only occasionally; when they do, it is usually for one purpose, most often for meditation sessions or for lectures. They practice Buddhism in the privacy of their homes by meditating and reading Buddhist books. After reading Buddhist books in the evening, they place their books on their nightstand, hence, the name, "Nightstand Buddhists." There is no reliable data on the

5. See above.

6. See above.

7. This term was coined by Professor Thomas A. Tweed, a scholar of American religion.

number of these Nightstand Buddhists, but I estimate their number to be about two million.⁸

And there is another group of people who have been strongly influenced by Buddhism. A survey revealed that 12 percent of the respondents replied that Buddhism has had an “important influence on their thinking about religion or spirituality.”⁹ This amounts to a surprisingly large number of about 25 million people.¹⁰

So, if we add up all three groups (Buddhists, Nightstand Buddhists, and those strongly influenced by Buddhism), they amount to over 30 million people or about 10 percent of the American population, whose lives have been deeply touched by Buddhism. This shows how much Buddhism has grown in the past 50 years to become an *American* religion.

Various Kinds of Buddhism

What would be your answer if you were asked, “Which metropolitan area in the world has the largest number of Buddhist *schools* or *denominations*?” Most people probably would answer, “Bangkok, Taipei or Kyoto” because they still see Buddhism as a religion of Asia.

Yes, it’s true that the vast majority of the approxi-

8. Based on the Wuthnow and Cage survey (see below) and the fact that half of the paid subscribers to the magazine *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* are not Buddhists.

9. Robert Wuthnow and Wendy Cage, “Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States: The Scope of Influence,” *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (September, 2004): 371.

10. This number is based on the year 2003 when the above survey was taken.



Buddhists of various traditions observing Vesak in celebration of the Buddha's birthday, enlightenment, and passing, sponsored by the Buddhist Council of Southern California. Photo by Don Farber.

mately 500 million Buddhists in the world live in Asia. However, here the question has to do with the number of different *schools* or *denominations*, not population. Surprisingly, the answer is the Los Angeles, California metropolitan area, where close to 100 different schools of Buddhism find their home. In other words, virtually all the main schools or denominations of Buddhism in Asia are now represented in Los Angeles.

In Asia, Buddhists from different countries have rarely known each other, let alone live in the same community. But in Los Angeles, temples with roots in Thailand, Korea and Vietnam are located in the same town or even on the same street. This same trend applies to other American major metropolitan areas such as Honolulu,



Pioneer Buddhist Teachers in America from Asia: Ratnasara (Sri Lanka), Thich Thien An (Vietnam), the Dalai Lama (Tibet), Hsing Yun (Taiwan), and Taizan Maezumi (Japan). Photo by Don Farber.

the San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle-Tacoma, Chicago, and New York.

In order to better understand all the various kinds of Buddhist schools, I have categorized them into four groups. They are as follows:

1) **Older Asian American Buddhists.** They started their temples in the mid to late 1800s and are mostly of Chinese and Japanese origin. Today, because they are mostly third, fourth and fifth generation Americans, their temple activities and services are held in English.

2) **Newer Asian American Buddhists.** They mostly arrived in the United States since the mid-1960s and are mostly of Cambodian, Korean, Laotian, Myanmar, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Thai, and Vietnamese origin. With a



Young Jodo Shinshu Buddhists at the Church of the Latter Day Saints in Salt Lake City for an inter-religious dialogue through music. Photo by Mark Minaga.



Three young Americans became monks at Hsi Lai Temple (of Taiwan origin) in Hacienda Heights, California. Photo courtesy of Hsi Lai Temple.



A boy attending Sunday service with his family at Berkeley Zen Center, California. Photo by Alan Senauke.

larger percentage of first-generation members, the temple activities and services are often held in the respective native language. However, English is being used with increasing frequency as the second and third generations come of age.

3) **Convert Buddhists whose main practice is meditation.** Unlike the first two groups, they were not born into Buddhist families but converted (changed to a new religion) to Buddhism as adults. They are predominately European Americans and belong to one of the three schools, Zen, Vipassana (meaning “insight,” based on the Theravada tradition of Southeast Asia) or Tibetan. Their main practice is sitting meditation. The immense popularity of mindfulness (insight) meditation especially as we entered the 21st century has definitely increased the numbers belonging to this group.



A young man at a ceremony celebration the Buddha's birthday. Photo by Don Farber.

4) **Convert Buddhists whose main practice is chanting.** Like the third group, they also converted to Buddhism as adults, and in this case they all belong to one school, Sokagakkai International–U.S.A. They are racially the *most diverse* group for they include not only Asian Americans and European Americans but also a good percentage of African Americans and Hispanic Americans. Their main practice is the repeated chanting of the name of the *Lotus Sutra* or the “daimoku,” which is pronounced “Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō.”

Famous Buddhists

The most well-known are actor Orlando Bloom, actor Richard Gere, actor Richard Segal, singer Tina Turner, golf player Tiger Woods, actor George Takei, jazz pianist



Actor Richard Gere (in the center) with Dalai Lama at JFK airport. Photo by Don Farber.

Herbie Hancock and movie director Oliver Stone. And the rap singer, the late Adam Yauch of the Beastie Boys, was a dedicated Buddhist, who composed a moving song about the promises of enlightened beings entitled, “Bodhisattva Vow.”

Recently there were three Buddhists to the United States Congress. This group consisted of Senator Mazie Hirono and Congresswoman Colleen Hanabusa from Hawaii, and the third was Congressman Hank Johnson from Georgia. Congressman Johnson especially drew a lot of media attention for being an African American from the south and for the distinction of becoming the first Buddhist in Congress along with Mazie Hirono.

While not as committed a Buddhist as the three, former Governor Jerry Brown of California studied meditation in Japan in his younger years. Actresses Goldie

Hawn and her daughter Kate Hudson are reported to be devoted practitioners of Buddhism.

The late Steve Jobs, the cofounder of Apple Computer, studied and practiced Buddhist meditation for many years. He valued Buddhism so much that his spiritual teacher, a Buddhist priest, conducted his wedding ceremony. So, he had a Buddhist wedding. Similarly, Phil Jackson, the legendary NBA basketball coach, has been a strong supporter of Buddhism. Known sometimes as “Zen Coach,” Jackson adopted Buddhist meditation and philosophy in his work, helping him to win an unbelievable eleven NBA championships (a record) with the Chicago Bulls and the Los Angeles Lakers. Both of these men, the IT visionary Steve Jobs and the legendary Coach Jackson, qualify as Buddhist sympathizers or “Nightstand Buddhists,” previously discussed.

Someone once commented in a kidding way, “Hey, Richard Gere and Tiger Woods don’t look Buddhist!” Well, Buddhists are not all monks with shaven heads nor are they all from Asia. So, Mr. Gere and Mr. Woods might not fit the stereotypical image, but they are Buddhists and are very dedicated ones at that.

Characteristics of American Buddhism

Buddhism in America has developed characteristics that differ from those in traditional Asian Buddhist countries. This trend is especially strong in the convert Buddhist communities. These characteristics are 1) equality, 2) practice-focused, 3) scientific, 4) socially engaged, 5) here and now, and 6) humor.

1) **Equality.** Women play much more of an equal role than in Asia. There are definitely more women teachers in proportion to men teachers than their counterparts in Asian countries. Women make up half of the teachers in some of the convert groups (See p. 16), such as the Insight Meditation Society. And women have held top leadership positions at the San Francisco Zen Center and elsewhere.

Monks and nuns are the norm in the Buddhist world in Asia, but American Buddhists have largely rejected the monastic lifestyle. Most priests are married with families. These democratic developments differ from the more traditional hierarchical relationships in Asia, where the monks and nuns are considered superior to laypeople, and men superior to women.



Ladies preparing the flower shrine for the Buddha's birthday celebration at Zen Center, Berkeley, California. Photo by Alan Senauke.

2) **Practice-focused.** When people belonging to many Buddhist denominations come together for a gathering of Buddhists, they tend to ask each other, “What’s your practice?” rather than “What’s your denomination or school?” This is because American Buddhists highly value practice, which comes mostly in the form of meditation and chanting. These forms of Buddhist practice are especially popular, as we saw above, among groups three and four, respectively.

More Americans are looking to *experience* their religion with their total being, not just to know about the teachings. Many of them feel that the religion in which they grew up had plenty of creeds to live by and doctrines to memorize, but they did not feel satisfied. But *meditation* makes them feel more relaxed, focused and



Ordinary people meditating at a Rizai Zen temple near Los Angeles.
Photo by Don Farber.

liberating. In other words, meditation is therapeutic and empowering, while providing them with the sense that they are working toward spiritual Awakening.

And importantly, anyone interested can practice these meditations anytime and anywhere. In Asia, mostly monks and nuns practiced meditation and in a formal setting with a teacher present. Plus, it was rare for men and women to meditate in the same room together. However, in America with some initial instructions, people are able to practice in the privacy of their home and at any time that suits them.

One of the most popular forms of meditation, called “mindfulness meditation,” has taken America by storm. Mindfulness meditation is the same technique as Buddhist vipassana, or insight meditation. Now, young and old are practicing mindfulness meditation in schools, prisons, hospitals and in workplaces. It has been reported that some children and youth become more calm and focused on their schoolwork if they learn how to do mindfulness meditation. (See p. 115)

Because of this, many people no longer consider mindfulness a “religious” practice because it has been separated from its Buddhist roots. Some Buddhists are alarmed and unhappy about this trend, but this should be seen as another characteristic of how Buddhism has been adapted in America.

3) **Scientific.** Psychology (which includes psychotherapy) has become one of the main ways for Americans to become interested in and to understand Buddhism, since they both focus on the mind and seek to overcome suffering. Consequently, many counselors and

therapists have converted to Buddhism or adopted Buddhist elements such as meditation into their professional practices.

Another reason for the popularity of Buddhism is that it does not conflict with natural science. This view contributed, for example, to the popularity of Fritjof Capra's landmark book *The Tao of Physics*, published in 1975.

The Dalai Lama, the world-famous Buddhist leader, has been at the forefront of dialogue between Buddhists and scientists. In fact, he has gone so far as to announce that in the area of the natural world, if there is any conflict with science, Buddhists should adjust their traditional understanding in accordance with science. For example, Buddhists can adopt Charles Darwin's theory of evolution without any problem, for the view that we humans evolved from so-called lesser life forms does nothing to make the Buddhist teachings false or irrelevant.

4) **Socially Engaged.** Many American Buddhists believe that Buddhism must help to lessen the problems of the world, such as global warming, domestic violence, poverty, discrimination, and crime. They say that Buddhism should not only be concerned with one's own happiness but should also care about others, especially those who are suffering.

While social engagement is not absent in Asia, for example, as will be discussed later, King Ashoka of India built medical clinics and made traveling easier. (See p. 53) And priests and their supporters helped to build bridges and irrigation ponds, while others ran temples that served as community centers where people gathered

Buddhist priests marching on Golden Gate Bridge to protest the persecution of Buddhists in Myanmar (Burma) and the abuse of human rights in China. Photo by Don Farber.



for advice on everyday life problems. So, I believe that for centuries before the modern period the level of social engagement for Buddhists in Asia and Christians in the West was basically the same.

However, Buddhism in America began in the late 19th century as a “modern” religion, when people came to feel that religions should contribute even more actively to make the world a better place. So, this way of thinking has influenced many American Buddhists past and present. And this outlook about religion and its role in society has no doubt been strengthened by the Jewish and Christian traditions of *social justice* that are prominent in American culture.

5) “**Here and now.**” In Asia, the traditional teachings regarded our present life as lying within the cycle of innumerable births and deaths (*samsara*), which is often translated as “reincarnation” or “transmigration.” The ideal Buddhist way of life was to “leave the world” to become a monk or a nun to focus on the Buddhist goal of spiritual Awakening (*nirvana*). By accomplishing that, they believed that they could be freed from the rounds of transmigration in which a person experienced birth and death endlessly.

It would be like getting on a Ferris wheel. The first few rounds are fun and interesting, but it would become boring and even dreadful if you had to go around and around cooped up in the same capsule and seeing the same scenery endlessly. Hence, for the monks and nuns, the present life was an opportunity for learning and practice so as to reach Awakening to “transcend” the present life.

In contrast to Asia, those American Buddhists who become monks and nuns are minuscule in numbers. The vast majority of even the Buddhist teachers are householders and lead ordinary lives in the world. They do not make it their primary aim to be liberated from transmigration but, instead, actively seek Awakening in this present life and even in this very body.

For example, the important Buddhist teaching, “everything changes” (*anitya*), is not understood by most American Buddhists as a reason for *not* getting *attached* to things, as it was for the monks and nuns. Rather, this teaching is taken as an encouragement to live fully “in the moment” and is reflected in a popular saying quoted by Buddhists:

“Yesterday is history and tomorrow is a mystery. But this moment is a gift, and that is why we call it the *present!*”

I love this quotation, which expresses the outlook that the Buddha himself expressed. (See p. 137) Also, it is humorous, which leads me to the next characteristic of American Buddhism.

6) **Humor.** The American love of religious humor has led to the creation of much Buddhist humor. There is, of course, humor to be found in traditional Buddhism in Asian countries but not in the same way or to the same degree as in America.

America is one of the most religious nations among the economically advanced countries in the West, but at the same time, Americans like to poke fun at religious people and institutions and find humor even in religious teachings. American Buddhists are no exception, as humor helps them to overcome their attachments and not to take themselves too seriously.

Perhaps the most well-known American Buddhist joke is one that has been aired even on mainstream radio programs:

“Why couldn’t the Buddha vacuum clean under his sofa?”

Well, the answer is . . .

“Because he had no attachments!”



(Chapter 11 is dedicated entirely to humor. See pp. 93 and 190 for explanation of this joke.)

Reasons for the Popularity of Buddhism

When something becomes popular, we can look at it from the standpoint of “supply” and “demand.” This is true for a product (for example, a video game), or sports (soccer), or certain values (protecting the environment). The popularity of Buddhism in America should be seen in the same light.

The “supply” side of Buddhism refers to the qualities that many Americans see and like about Buddhism. And those qualities are the very characteristics that were described in the previous section, “The Characteristics of American Buddhism.” In other words, many Americans see in Buddhism a religion (or spirituality or philosophy) that

supplies them with the qualities of equality, practice-focus, scientific outlook, here-and-now, and humor.

We have, however, already discussed these qualities in detail, so we would now like to look at the “demand” side. This refers to those factors that “pull” and “welcome” Buddhism to America. And these factors are 1) the importance of religion for Americans, 2) the historical changes that made American society more open, 3) the changes in what people seek in religion, and 4) the Dalai Lama’s popularity.

1) **The importance of religion.** Americans value religion to a much higher degree than people in most other developed countries. American people generally hold pastors, priests, rabbis and religious professionals in high regard. And many of these religious leaders also play important roles as leaders of the *general* community over and beyond their particular churches, temples, mosques and synagogues.

Religion is seen to be “a good thing,” providing a spiritual and ethical foundation especially for children. This is why many parents take their children to church in the belief that religion will help them to be happier and more ethical people when they grow up.

Many of us take this positive view of religion for granted, but this is not necessarily true in many other developed societies in the world, including Japan and France.¹¹ Religion plays a *less* important role in the

11. I wish to qualify that people in these countries do value the essence of religion but do not take their children on a regular basis to temples and churches for religious education.

lives of people living in those countries, a process called “secularism.”¹² So, if religion were not as important in America, far fewer people would be taking interest in Buddhism.

2) **Societal openness.** The second reason for the growth of American Buddhism lies in the fundamental societal shift that took place in the 1960s, with greater openness toward religions other than Protestantism. For example, John F. Kennedy became the first Catholic president of the United States. Also, the Catholic Church itself became more open to change in its teachings, rituals and relationship with other religions in a liberalization process initiated by the “Second Vatican Council.” Also, the new 1965 immigration law helped to foster greater diversity with the arrival of more people from non-Western countries, including from Asia.

Within this greater openness, Buddhism was no longer seen as an exotic religion of the Orient. In fact, many people interested in spiritual matters thought that “spiritual Asia” was superior to “materialistic West.” Consequently, many people were attracted to Buddhism because they thought Buddhism was one of the “superior” Asian religions that could respond better to the spiritual needs of the industrialized West.

3) **Spirituality.** The third reason in this growth has to do with the change in the very nature of religion in America. In this change, people have become more attracted to spirituality than to organized religion, such as

12. As secularism become stronger, religion becomes less important for not only the people but also for the society in general.



One of the largest temples in America. Hsi Lai Temple in Hacienda Heights, California. Photo by Don Farber.

churches, synagogues, temples and mosques. More people are heard saying, “I am not religious but spiritual.”

A famous scholar of religion explained spirituality as “personal experience tailored to the individual’s own quests.” He then went on to define “spirituality” in five key terms, *connectedness, unity, peace, harmony, and centeredness*. This differs from the five terms that characterize traditional religion, which are *God, sin, faith, repentance, and morals*.¹³

13. Wade Clark Roof, “Religious Kaleidoscope,” *Temenos* 32 (1996): 183–193.

Buddhism, as presented in America, is characterized more by the former set of terms than the latter, which makes it fit more with the changing or new trend centered on spirituality. As part of this attraction to spirituality that stresses personal experience, Buddhism has been particularly effective in the following three areas.

The first is the healthy attitude of Buddhism when dealing with the suffering from the difficulties we face in life, such as old age, death, and losses (of loved ones, athletic matches, etc.) Buddhism sees difficulties as a *natural* part of life that needs to be understood, accepted, and turned into a springboard for living a more full and meaningful life.

Second, Buddhism has been valuable in the *personal* understanding of many individuals, because the Buddhist teachings need to speak directly to the experience of unique individuals. Many Americans like to feel they are free to question religious teachings and to make up their own minds about them. This is the reason why many American Buddhists are particularly fond of these famous words of the Buddha: "Do not accept a statement on the grounds that it is found in our scriptures...or because it's the authority of the teachers..."¹⁴

The third area of spirituality is found in people's attraction to meditation. This is probably the number one reason for the growth of American Buddhism. Many find Buddhist meditation easy to do, mentally therapeutic,

14. Lama Surya Das, *Awakening the Buddha Within*, (Broadway Books, 1998), p. 388. Quoted by Das to show what Americans like about Buddhism.



Spirit Rock Meditation Center, Woodacre, California. Photo courtesy of Spirit Rock Meditation Center.

and spiritually empowering and liberating. Sitting meditation, in particular, is the main practice in Zen, Theravada, and Tibetan schools, which have attracted the largest number of converts.

4) **The Dalai Lama's influence.** The fourth reason for the growth lies in the positive image of one single individual, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso. He is well-known as a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and an exiled leader of Tibet, and his impact in the West has been enormous.

He is loved and esteemed by the thousands who flock to hear his talks during his numerous American visits. The Dalai Lama is popular because people see him as a spiritual leader who is peaceful, tolerant, and friendly.



Thousands come to hear the Dalai Lama at Central Park, New York.
Photo by Don Farber.

He has helped to foster a new and refreshing kind of image of a religious leader in America.

So, Buddhism has become very much part of the American landscape. It used to be said that there is a Chinese restaurant in almost every town in America, but the same is now becoming true of Buddhist temples and meditation centers. So, this change is remarkable!

Where did all of this begin? To understand the answer to this question, we need to go back around 2,600 years, to the foothills of the Himalayas, and to learn more about the birth of a man whom the Buddhists call “the Buddha.”

Let us now turn to that beginning in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Life of the Buddha

Background

The Buddha was a human being, not a god or a divine being. So he should not be compared with Yahweh in Judaism, God in Christianity, or Allah in Islam. Instead, it would be more appropriate to compare him to Jesus of Nazareth or the Prophet Muhammad, both of whom were born and lived on this earth, though in the Middle East, not in India.

The Buddha lived in the northeastern area of the Indian subcontinent some 2,600 years ago, about five hundred years before Jesus. Experts are divided on the exact years of his life: 624–544 B.C.E., 566–486, or 480–400. In this book, we will adopt the middle dates, that is to say, 566–486 B.C.E.

The records tell us that the Buddha was born a prince of a small kingdom of a clan called the “Shakya,” located

on the present-day borders of India and Nepal.¹ His given name was “Siddhartha,” meaning “he whose purpose (*artha*) is accomplished (*siddha*).” His family name was “Gautama,” which means the highest (*tama*) cow (*go*).

In Sanskrit, the main language from ancient India, the term “Buddha” means “one who has awakened” or the “Awakened One.” So, “Buddha” is actually a title used to refer to anyone who attains ultimate spiritual Awakening, which is the goal of many Buddhists, past and present. So, this is true also for many Buddhists living in America and other parts of the world.

In other words, in Buddhism, there are as many “Buddhas” as there are awakened people. Yet, normally when we say “the Buddha,” we are referring to the Indian prince who became the founder of Buddhism. To avoid any confusion, he is often referred to as “Shakyamuni Buddha”; “Shakya” in “Shakyamuni” refers to the name of his clan and “muni” means the “sage” (a person of wisdom). Thus, Shakyamuni means, “the sage of the Shakya Clan.”

Birth

Siddhartha Gautama was born to King Shuddhodana and Queen Maya. According to Buddhist legend, one

1. Kapilavathu, the place of the Buddha’s birth, is considered to lie on the Nepalese side of the border as it is set today. Modern Nepalese insist that he was born in their country, but, of course, there was no border there at the time. So, it would be more accurate to say that Siddhartha Gautama was born on the “Indian subcontinent.” It is in that sense that the term “India” or “Indian” will be used in this book.

night Queen Maya had a strange dream, in which she dreamed that a white elephant entered her womb through the right side of her chest.² Soon after, she learned that she had conceived a child. When it came time to give birth, Queen Maya set out to return to her parents' home to have the baby, in keeping with the custom of her day.

On her way, she took a rest in the Lumbini Garden, finding herself captivated by the beautiful flowers of the Ashoka trees. As she reached up for a branch of one of the trees, it is said that the tree bent down to meet her hand. She then gave birth in a standing position, while holding on to the branch for support.

As soon as her baby, the prince, was born, legend has it that he took seven steps. Then he pointed the right arm up and the left arm down and proclaimed, "In heavens above and on earth, I alone am the World-honored One!" In another



Statue of Baby Buddha. (Courtesy of BDK)

2. "Legends" are stories often written by later followers of extraordinary people. They are often described as having super-human qualities, such as the Buddha's mother becoming pregnant through extra-ordinary ways, the Buddha walking as soon as being born, and making statements that seem to praise him.

er version of the legend, he added: “This is my last birth. There will be no further rebirth.”³

But the joy of his birth was short-lived, as Queen Maya suddenly died. The prince was, then, brought up by his aunt, his mother’s younger sister, Mahaprajapati.

Childhood

By many accounts, the young prince was a sensitive child. Once, he sat under a tree, watching a farmer plowing the field. Soon a bird swooped down to eat an earthworm. Then as the bird took to the sky, a huge bird attacked the smaller bird.

This shocked the sensitive young prince, and he was saddened by the fact that creatures have to hunt and eat others. Saddened, he whispered to himself, “Oh! Must all living creatures have to kill each other?” He felt deep sadness for the plight of living creatures, even of earthworms and tiny birds.

Given the sensitive nature of the young prince, his father, King Shuddhodana, was probably not surprised when a hermit named Ashita prophesized that his son would be either a great king who would rule the four corners of the world or a great spiritual leader, the savior of the world.

The father, of course, wanted his son to follow in his footsteps and to become a future king, but knowing the sensitive nature of Siddhartha, the king was fearful that his son might abandon the kingdom in favor of seeking

3. This means that he will become a Buddha in this life to become, as previously mentioned, free of the suffering of transmigration.



the spiritual path. So, King Shuddhodana did everything in his power to shield the young prince from experiencing pain and suffering. The prince was surrounded only by young, healthy and beautiful people, and sheltered by a life of abundance and pleasure within the perfect setting within the palace.

Excursions

However, this all came to an end when he wandered outside the palace gates four separate times, which came to be known as the “Excursions from the Four Gates,” or “the Four Messengers.”

On his first journey, accompanied by his driver, Prince Siddhartha rode out from the east gate of the palace in a chariot. He then came upon a very old person, bent over and barely able to walk even with a cane. The prince had never seen anyone like him before since he



knew only young people. So, the prince was puzzled and asked the driver who the strange looking person could be. The driver explained that he was an elderly man and that everyone would be like him if one lived long enough. Shocked, the prince asked, “I, too?” and the reply was, “Yes, you too, sir.”

On another day, the prince left the palace from the south gate. Shortly thereafter, the prince came upon a very sick person lying on the side of the road in great pain and agony. The prince had never seen anyone like him before since he had surrounded himself with only healthy people.

So, the prince was puzzled and asked the driver what was happening to the person who was in pain. The driver then explained that he was sick and that virtually everyone would get sick if one lived long enough. Shocked, the prince asked, “I, too?” and the reply was, “Yes, you too, sir.”

The prince left the palace yet a third time from the west gate. He came upon a dead person surrounded by his family and friends who were wailing and crying, overcome with grief. The prince had never seen people in grief as well as the body of a deceased person, since he had lived only with young and healthy people.

So, the prince was puzzled and asked the driver why the body lay so still and why the people were crying. The driver explained that the person had died and that everyone eventually dies. Shocked once more, he asked, “I, too?” and the reply was, “Yes, you too, sir.”

On another day, the prince left from the north gate, where he came upon a different scene from the past three excursions. He came upon a wandering monk. The monk’s serenity and inner glow captivated the prince. So the prince asked the driver who this person was, and how the monk had become so peaceful looking.

The driver then explained that he was a monk who had abandoned ordinary life to seek a spiritual life. The prince was strangely attracted to the monk to such an extent that he wanted to be like him. As a young man, he felt he had found what he wanted to do in life.

For Prince Siddhartha, the four excursions outside the castle walls were a series of life-changing experiences that influenced the decision he later took, leading to the next phase of his life.

Leaving Home

After the excursion experience, the prince was tormented as he debated within himself about his future course. Af-



ter some time went by, at the age of 29, the prince decided to pursue the life of a monk in hope of finding a way to overcome human suffering. Leaving home was, however, a very difficult decision, for not only would he be abandoning his role as the future king and disappointing his father, but by now the prince was married and had a newborn son named Rahula.

The prince had taken a wife named Yashodara, a princess from a neighboring country. It was an arranged marriage in keeping with the custom of that time. They were happily married and were now blessed with a baby boy, making the prince's decision to leave them even more tormenting.

In a heartbreaking scene, Siddhartha wanted to hold his son for the last time but stopped himself, for he did not want to awaken his wife, as this would have made his departure immensely more difficult. As he left the room, the prince looked one last time toward his wife and son, fighting back his emotions.

Today we may look at his actions as being uncaring and selfish, but it was customary in those days for spiritual seekers to leave their homes. However, most of them did so much later in life, unlike Siddhartha, who was in the prime of his life at the age of 29. But Siddhartha was extraordinary, for he wanted desperately to find a way out of suffering, not only for himself but also for all humanity, especially for his loved ones.

As Siddhartha got ready to leave the castle, his servant Channa prepared a white horse, Kanthaka, for the departure. The prince had Channa accompany him till he arrived at the border of the kingdom, where he cut off his lock of hair and took off his royal apparel in exchange for a simple garment of a spiritual seeker. He then asked Channa to return to the castle with the horse. Having to part with his master, Channa was deeply saddened and wept openly. Siddhartha comforted Channa repeatedly, asking him to inform the family left behind that he was all right and that they should not worry.

Ascetic Practice

After seeing Channa off, Siddhartha began his search. From this point on, he was no longer a prince but rather an ascetic dedicated to finding spiritual Awakening. He could also be called “Bodhisattva,” meaning the “seeker of Awakening.”⁴ His search led him to two kinds

4. “Bodhisattva” does also refer to those who have attained high states of Awakening especially in Mahayana Buddhism, but this is an usage used in early Buddhism particularly when referring to Prince Siddhartha as a spiritual seeker.

of rigorous discipline, first meditation and then later, austerities.

He first studied with a teacher named Arada Kalama, who taught him a form of meditation called “attainment of the state of nothing at all.” Siddhartha practiced diligently and quickly mastered it, but it did not lead him to the goal that he was seeking.

Then, he went to learn another form of meditation called the “attainment of neither perception nor non-perception” taught by another famous teacher, Udraka Ramaputra. Again, Siddhartha quickly mastered it and even became one of the teachers of this method, but again he was not satisfied.

Having found both meditation methods that led to deep internal states of calm and concentration ultimately unsatisfying, Siddhartha decided to try physical austerities or extreme hardship. He learned to survive on one grain of rice and one drop of water a day. These ascetic practices aimed at weakening the strength of the body in order to allow the inner pure spirit to be freed from the bonds of the flesh. It is said that this decision was, in part, a reaction to the life of luxury and physical pleasure of the palace that he had left behind.

The austere practices were so demanding that his body became extremely emaciated or thin, to the point where his arms and legs became so thin that, in his words, they were like “the jointed stems of creepers or bamboo,” and his eyes sank deep in their sockets like “the gleam of water seen deep down at the bottom of a deep well.”

Unfortunately, yet again, he was making no progress whatsoever, giving him no choice but to abandon these



austere practices. Hence, both his life of pleasure in the palace and the six years of ascetic life in the forest could not bring peace.

Awakening (Enlightenment or Nirvana)

Siddhartha came to the realization that he needed to avoid the *extremes*. He had taken up the austerities as a reaction to the life of luxury and satisfaction of desires he had known in the palace, but had gone too far in depriving himself of food and sleep. A healthy body was, of course, important. So, he decided to receive an offering of milk and rice offered by a young woman named Sujata from a nearby village.

Having regained his physical strength, Siddhartha, the Bodhisattva, sat under a Pipal tree, which came to be called “the tree of Awakening” or Bodhi tree, and re-



solved not to leave the spot until he had realized the state of Awakening. In the shade of the tree, he then settled into a state of deep meditative calm and peace.

There are many accounts of what actually took place, but one that many find easy to understand and appreciate is explained in a story of the Bodhisattva's encounter with a figure called Mara. Mara means "the bringer of death," and one that symbolizes our mental and emotional attachment. In this tale, Mara appeared before the Bodhisattva with various temptations to get the Bodhisattva to give in to his greed, hatred and ignorance.

For example, Mara sent an army of demons to attack him with many kinds of weapons. However, Siddhartha perceived the demons and their weapons as representing the attachment of hatred and anger. Consequently, he did not react to them and so the rain of weapons hurled at him by the demons turned into a rain of beautiful

flowers. In this way, the Bodhisattva saw that people suffer because they let these attachments run wild and overwhelm them.

Mara then approached Siddhartha directly to challenge him and asked, by what right did he sit under the tree of Awakening? Siddhartha replied, by the right of having practiced the spiritual path for a long time. Mara countered him by saying that he, too, had done the same. Besides which, he had all his armies to vouch or be his witness for this fact; but who, he asked, could vouch for Siddhartha?

Siddhartha, the Bodhisattva, then, touched the ground with his right hand, calling on the very earth as witness in what has come to be known as the “earth-touching gesture.” This signaled Mara’s defeat and Siddhartha, the Bodhisattva’s Awakening as the Buddha.⁵

This is obviously not the whole story of the Buddha’s Awakening, but rather gives us a glimpse into the nature of that Awakening, as described in the scriptures:

When the morning star appeared in the eastern sky, the struggle was over and the Bodhisattva’s mind was as clear and bright as the breaking day. He had, at last, found the path to Awakening. He had become the “Awakened One,” the Buddha!

This Awakening is also referred to as “enlightenment” or “nirvana.” Nirvana means “the state where

5. This implies that the Buddha’s witness (earth itself) was superior to Mara’s witness (his armies).

one's flame of greed, hatred and ignorance has been blown out." For your information, Nirvana is now considered an English word and even became the name of two internationally famous rock bands, one British and the other American.⁶

In this Awakening, the Buddha had directly experienced truth, which the Indians called "Dharma." He found himself in a sublime and peaceful state beyond anything that any words could describe. But most importantly, the Buddha had gained full understanding about the nature of suffering, the cause of suffering, and the way to overcome suffering. This, if you recall, was the very reason why he pursued the spiritual path, even as he sacrificed his family and the throne.

Teachings

We are told that the Buddha spent some weeks enjoying the bliss of Awakening under and near the Bodhi tree or the tree of Awakening. He also felt hesitant to share the insights of his Awakening with others because he saw that the people in the world would not be able to understand them. The people were, in the Buddha's view, too attached or caught up with the matters of the world to comprehend what he would have to say about the Dharma.

Then, Brahma, the Hindu god, appeared before the Buddha to request him to teach the Dharma for the sake

6. The British band was formed in 1965 and the American band in 1987.



of those who would be interested. Encouraged by Brahma that there would be some people who might be able to comprehend his words, the Buddha decided to share his insights.

Once he decided to share what he had discovered, the Buddha walked some 100 miles to the city of Benares. In the Deer Park in the nearby town of Saranath, he met up with the five fellow monks with whom he had trained together during the period of austere practices.

At first, they shunned him for they saw him as a “quitter,” who had quit the austere practices. However, soon Buddha’s demeanor and his words won them over as they heard the Buddha deliver his first sermon, centered on his core teaching, the Four Noble Truths (see Chapter 5).⁷

Empowered by the authentic virtues of his Awak-

7. This sermon is found in the “Sutra of the Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dharma.”

ening and guided by the skillfulness of his teaching, they listened earnestly and soon attained Awakening. They, then, became the Buddha's first disciples and began to form the Sangha, the order of monks and nuns.

From that point on, the Buddha journeyed around several kingdoms of Northeast India to share his teachings. His personal qualities of charisma and compassion led many to seek him as their teacher. Many became his disciples, and the size of the Sangha swelled. According to some accounts, even his wife, Yashodhara, his son, Rahula, his stepmother, Mahaprajapati, and his father, Shuddhodana also joined the Sangha.

Despite his initial hesitation to share, the Buddha dedicated the rest of his life to traveling throughout the region in order to teach. Over the course of 45 years of teaching, the Buddha inspired numerous ordinary people as well as monks and nuns who formed the Sangha.

Passing

When he was 80 years old, he became ill after accepting a meal, which contained either pork or mushrooms, offered by a smith named Chunda. Illness caused intense pain and bleeding, but the Buddha kept walking toward his next destination. Arriving in the town of Kushinagara, he lay down between two large Sala trees. Despite his illness, he continued to teach until the last moments of life.

When asked by his disciples what should be done after he passed away, the Buddha replied that rather than saying prayers and making offerings to his body, he en-



couraged them to focus on their own practice. Seeing his disciples, lay supporters and even the animals weeping amid the sadness of the imminent death of their teacher, the Buddha spoke these famous words to comfort and encourage them to strive harder:

“Make yourself the light. Rely upon yourself.
Do not depend upon anyone else. Make my
teachings your light.”

The Buddha did not choose a successor in a particular individual but told his disciples to regard his teachings, the Dharma, which he had shared for the past 45 years, to serve as the guide after his death.

Sensing that his end was approaching he entered a state of deep meditation and took his last breath calmly and peacefully. The Buddha had entered *complete* nirva-

na (*pari-nirvana*), in which the passions of the physical body had also become completely extinguished. He had attained the ultimate state beyond all suffering. At that point, the legends tell us that the earth shook and a thundering sound was heard from the heavens.

Chapter 3

Brief History of Buddhism in Asia

Today there are two major branches of Buddhism. One is called the Theravada (School of Elders), which is dominant in Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. The other is called the Mahayana (the Larger Vehicle), which is practiced in China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Taiwan, Tibet, and Vietnam. Both branches trace their roots to the original teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. The Buddha himself belonged to no specific school, just as Jesus was not Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox or Protestant.

Early Years

Soon after the death of the Buddha in around 486 B.C.E., his disciples of the Sangha (the community of monks and nuns) gathered in a large council to determine and preserve his teachings. Ananda, a disciple who was at the Buddha's side for the last twenty years of life,

took the lead in reciting the teachings that he had heard from the Buddha.

These teachings were then memorized, preserved and transmitted to future generations, without being put *into writing*. These teachings would be transmitted orally for about 400 hundred years! They were finally put into writing around the beginning of the Common Era or about the time Jesus of Nazareth was born.

During the one hundred years after the passing of the Buddha, the disciples spread the teachings to a wider area of the Northeastern part of the Indian subcontinent. Consequently, when the second council was gathered around 386 B.C.E., the Sangha had been divided into 18 schools. Each of the schools had developed its own emphasis on the parts of the teachings and practices that were important to it.

Around 268 B.C.E., King Ashoka took reign over much of the Indian subcontinent. He strongly supported the Buddhist religion by carving the teachings on high stone pillars that he erected throughout his empire. These pillars have been unearthed in modern times and have served as a valuable resource for Buddhist history. The King uplifted the living conditions of his people by building medical clinics and making traveling easier by building hostels and planting trees along travel roads.

King Ashoka helped to spread the Buddhist teachings beyond India by sending missionaries to the neighboring countries. He even sent his own son, Mahinda, to Sri Lanka, which marks the beginning of Buddhism in that country. We shall discuss a bit later the spread of Buddhism to Sri Lanka and to other countries, but we

still need to say a few words about how Buddhism continued to develop on the Indian subcontinent.

Mahayana Branch in India

Around the beginning of the Common Era, around 450 years after the death of the Buddha, a new form of Buddhism called the Mahayana (larger vehicle) began to emerge. This movement was separate from the 18 earlier schools, as its leaders believed that their teachings expressed the true *intent* of what the Buddha taught. In their view, all beings have the potential to become Buddhas, and they called this potentiality “Buddha nature.” This Buddha nature is none other than the “jewel within” emphasized in this book.

The Mahayana sought to embrace *all* people by including the laypersons more on an equal footing with the monks and nuns. So they thought of themselves as the “Greater Vehicle” and criticized some of the eighteen earlier schools by calling them the “Hinayana” (Smaller Vehicle).

Consequently, some people, even today, refer to Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia as the “Smaller Vehicle.” This should be avoided for two reasons. It is historically wrong to call it by that name.¹ And secondly, it is ethically wrong to use a negative name to refer to other groups, especially when the Theravada

1. The Theravada Buddhists had left India for Sri Lanka at least a couple of a hundred years before the Mahayana Buddhists came on the scene.

Buddhists are just as concerned about the welfare of all beings as are the Mahayana Buddhists.

Admittedly, Mahayana Buddhists have emphasized more than the Theravada Buddhists the idea that laypersons can realize Awakening, not just monks and nuns. For example, an Awakened layperson by the name of Vimalakirti is well-known for having taught even famous monks about the deeper truth in the Buddhist teachings.

Vimalakirti was considered to be a Bodhisattva.² The Bodhisattvas were a category of Awakened people whom the Mahayana Buddhists aspired to become. The actions of the Bodhisattvas were motivated by their compassion for other beings, so much so that they voluntarily put off becoming Buddhas themselves in order to stay in the world to assist all beings to attain Awakening.³

A number of Mahayana branches developed within the next five hundred years in India, mostly centered on specific sutras (Buddhist texts) or sets of sutras. For example, the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* led to the formation of the Middle Way school, which was founded by Nagarjuna (around 150–250). Another set of sutras that included the *Sandhinirmocana Sutra* inspired a school called the Consciousness-Only School. Two brothers,

2. Here the term “Bodhisattva” means those who attained higher levels of Awakening and is not being used in exactly the same sense as when referring to Siddhartha before becoming the Buddha.

3. In this context, it was thought that once a person became a Buddha, he or she would teach for some time but *eventually* go *beyond* this world. But some elected to remain in this world, who were then referred to as “Bodhisattvas.”

Asanga and Vasubandhu (around 400), were the key figures of this school.

The *Garland Sutra*, *Lotus Sutra*, *Nirvana Sutra* and the *Larger Pure Land Sutra*, on the other hand, did not contribute to the formation of a doctrinally based school in India. However, their teachings of universal salvation, the depictions of the realms of Awakening, and their aesthetically inspiring images have generated a large following and continue to this day to have major influence where Mahayana Buddhism has spread.

Despite the flourishing of Mahayana forms, we must not forget that some of the earlier schools of Buddhism continue to exist throughout India. The monks and nuns of these schools continued to keep their monasteries thriving and contributed to the establishment of centers of learning such as Nalanda and Vikramashila. Nalanda was built as early as the sixth century and can be seen as one of the earliest “universities” in the world.

From around the sixth century a distinct form of teaching called Tantra or Vajrayana (diamond vehicle) became popular throughout India and most of the Buddhist world. It has been particularly strong in Tibet and continues to be so today. Some scholars regard this as the third branch of Buddhism, separate from Theravada and Mahayana, while others see it as part of the Mahayana. We agree with the second group of scholars, so shall mention it briefly here as part of the Mahayana branch.

Buddhist Tantra is a form of mysticism mixed with magic. Magic includes spells or sacred words, which when recited were believed to protect people from such dangers as snakebites. Buddhists also incorporated from

Hinduism sacred sounds such as “Aum” (pronounced “Ooum”). Besides these sacred words, Buddhist Tantra adopted magic circles or *mandalas*, which were used in rituals in which the meditator sought to become the deity (gods, supernatural beings) that he or she conjured up.

All of these features are difficult to fully understand without experiencing them ourselves, but two other distinct features of Buddhist Tantra were 1) the necessity of having a personal teacher, a guru, and 2) the view that the world is *essentially* pure. With such features, to practice Tantra was not for ordinary Buddhist followers but for the highly trained. Nevertheless, Tantric Buddhism played a dominant role starting around 600 C.E.

Starting in the sixth century, Buddhism began its gradual decline particularly in the northern areas of India, such as Gandhara and Kashmir. Buddhism lasted longer in the Ganges valley, but it gradually fell victim to the forces that weakened its existence. One such force was the expansion of Muslim influence that proved detrimental to Buddhism. In 1198, Nalanda University was attacked and burned and ceased to exist a few decades later. Vikramashila, the other center of learning, was destroyed soon after.

These attacks were not the only reason for the eventual disappearance of Buddhism from the land of its birth. Buddhists themselves are to be blamed. Because the kings and ruling groups were Buddhism’s main supporters, the Buddhist institutions became less concerned with the needs of ordinary people. So when they lost royal support or were destroyed by outside forces, there was

no strong popular support to rebuild and support Buddhist institutions.

And Buddhism gradually came to be *absorbed* by Hinduism, the dominant religion on the Indian subcontinent. For example, Buddha has become one of the manifestations (avatars) of the Hindu God, Vishnu.

Let us now look at how Buddhism spread beyond India. For that, we must go back to the time of King Ashoka in the 3rd century B.C.E. As you recall, King Asoka unified the Indian subcontinent and became a strong supporter of Buddhism and helped to spread it beyond India.

Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia

SRI LANKA

The Buddhism that Mahinda, King Ashoka's son, transmitted was the Theravada or the School of Elders, one of the eighteen schools. King Tissa of Sri Lanka adopted Buddhism and helped in its spread throughout the island. Soon Buddhism became the state religion.

In the early 11th century, the Tamils from India conquered the island. This severely disrupted the Sangha, the order of Buddhist monks and nuns. A huge casualty of the conquest was the women's order of nuns, whose line of transmission was severed. This prevented new nuns from being ordained in the country.⁴

4. Ordination requires a proper ritual with a minimum number of nuns, but the disruptions from the foreign occupation prevented it.

Within several decades, the Tamils were driven out with the aid of the Burmese (people of Myanmar), who also helped to revive the men's order of monks. The Burmese were able to provide the monks required for carrying out the ordination. On the other hand, the women's order was unfortunately unable to revive itself. However, in recent years, after close to one thousand years, the order of nuns in Sri Lanka has been revived with the assistance of the order of nuns from Taiwan.

From the 16th century, Buddhism again was weakened as the Portuguese, the Dutch and finally the British colonized Sri Lanka. But from the late 1800s a movement began to revitalize Buddhism by debating the Christians and strengthening the Buddhist disciplines and teachings.

This movement was helped by the support of an American Buddhist, Henry Steel Olcott, who was mentioned earlier and will be discussed later in relation to American Buddhism. Olcott is highly respected even today for his contribution to the revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, which continues to be the dominant religion in Sri Lanka.

MYANMAR (BURMA)

Buddhism was first introduced to Burma when King Ashoka sent monks as missionaries in the middle of the 3rd century B.C.E. From that point on, Buddhist presence grew and began to play an important role in the country. Buddhism gained prominence during the period of the Pagan kingdom (849–1287), when the kings supported Theravada Buddhism while turning away the

influx of Hinduism, Mahayana Buddhism and Tantric Buddhism.

During the reign of King Anawrahta (1040–1077), Burma became the most thriving center of Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia. For example, it was during this time that monks were sent to Sri Lanka to help restore their ordination line, which was threatened by extinction. The capital of Pagan was transformed by the building of numerous magnificent religious structures, eventually boasting close to 10,000 pagodas (*stupas*) and temples. Its splendor was known in Europe through the writings of Marco Polo.

From that point on, for close to a millennium, Theravada Buddhism has remained strong through centuries of monarchy, British colonization and the post-World War II period. Today, the monasteries and temples play a prominent role in the religious lives of the people of Myanmar. Myanmar's form of Buddhism is especially known for its strength in meditation, thus, drawing many from the West and other Asian countries seeking training in authentic meditative practices.

CAMBODIA, THAILAND AND LAOS

Because of their intimate historical connections, we will consider the three countries together. First, with regard to Cambodia, Buddhism first arrived there as early the 1st century C.E., and by the 5th century, Buddhism of the Mahayana branch existed side by side with Hinduism. The rulers for the next seven hundred years supported both religions, which are reflected at the world-famous site, the Angkor Wat with its motifs of both religions.

In the late 12th century, a Burmese monk introduced the Theravada branch of Buddhism to Cambodia. Within one hundred years, Theravada Buddhism had supplanted the Mahayana variety to become the dominant form of Buddhism in Cambodia. The Khmer kings also dropped their support of Hinduism in favor of Theravada Buddhism, which then went on to become the dominant religion of the Cambodian people up to the present.

As for Thailand, Theravada Buddhism was introduced from Burma to Thailand in the 13th century, with the emergence of a strong kingdom headed by King Ramkham-haeng. A couple of centuries later in the 15th century, the kings adopted Hindu ceremonies and law, but Buddhism continued to be strong among the ordinary people.

Buddhism continued to thrive in Thailand, so much so that in the 18th century monks from Sri Lanka turned to Thailand as a source of knowledge and the ordination transmission line for revitalizing Sri Lankan Buddhism. To this day, Buddhism continues to be the Thai national religion, symbolized by the custom of requiring the king of Thailand to be ordained for a brief period as a Buddhist monk.

As in Burma and Cambodia, Laotian people's earliest encounter with Buddhism was with Mahayana Buddhism. But in the 14th century, Theravada Buddhism was introduced from Cambodia at the time of the founding of the first Laotian state. Supported by subsequent kings, Theravada became the official religion of Laos. Today, over 95 percent of the people in Laos are Buddhist.

MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA

Theravada Buddhism is also found in Malaysia and Indonesia, where its presence is very small compared to the other Southeast Asian countries already discussed. These two countries are interesting in that the Buddhists find themselves in societies where Islam is the dominant religion.

Buddhism along with Hinduism entered Indonesia as early as the 2nd century. Today, Buddhism is considered one of Indonesia's six officially recognized religions. Its followers make up about one percent of the population, and the vast majority of the Buddhists are ethnic Chinese. The memories of Buddhism in the ancient history of this country are symbolized by the magnificent, world-famous stupa at Borobudur on the island of Java.

Buddhism entered Malaysia also in the 2nd century C.E., brought over by priests as well as by merchants. Today, Buddhists are much more numerous in Malaysia than in Indonesia, as Buddhism is the second largest religion. Buddhists make up about 20 percent of the entire population and most of them are involved in business and various professions, living in the urban areas. As in Indonesia, most of the Buddhists are of Chinese heritage, and they also practice other forms of Chinese religions including Confucianism and Daoism.

THE ROLE OF MONKS

We have presented an overview of Buddhism in Southeast Asia, where the Theravada branch is dominant. When asked what the main characteristic of Theravada Buddhism is, I would point to the important role of the

monks. Perhaps you have seen the scenes of saffron-robed monks meditating in the monasteries or on their morning rounds of collecting alms in the streets with their “begging bowls.”

These monks are considered to be in the best position to realize Awakening in this life. The laypersons play the role of supporters, in the hope that in future lives they will become monks or nuns themselves. They believe that when they donate meals and robes to the monks and money to the temples, they are creating “merit” which will help them have lives of inner peace and good fortune.

On a personal note, many years ago when I was 23 years old, I, too, led the life of a novice monk for a couple of months in a monastery in Bangkok, Thailand. (See its photo at the back of this book) I still have many fond memories, particularly of the stillness of the predawn hours, the aroma of the food being placed in my alms bowl, the genuine devotion of the lay supporters, and the coolness of the ground as my bare feet paced mindfully through the town streets.

I have nothing but respect for the monks who dedicate their lives to overcome greed, hatred, and ignorance. I admire their self-reliance, for they exemplify the Buddha’s final words:

“Make yourself the light. Rely upon yourself.
Do not depend upon anyone else.”

We have now looked at how Buddhism spread to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian countries. Now we shall

explore how Buddhism spread north to China and to other East Asian countries mostly by land via the caravan routes, which later came to be known as the “Silk Route.”

Buddhism in China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan

CHINA

Buddhism entered China in the 1st century C.E. mostly through the silk routes of Central Asia.⁵ Buddhism remained a “foreign” minor religion for a few centuries. Then in the 5th century, the Northern Wei Dynasty adopted Buddhism as its state religion.

From the 5th century Buddhism received the support of various dynasties. Then in the 7th century, Buddhism, along with Confucianism and Daoism, became the state religion of the Tang Dynasty (618–907). During this period in China, Buddhism experienced its golden age.

During this dynasty, the number of Buddhist temples and monks and nuns grew enormously. Buddhism received not only the support of the emperors but also that of the ordinary people. This supportive environment led to the emergence of many different Buddhist schools, such as Tiantai, Huayan, Faxiang and Chenyan.

5. Recent studies are showing that there was much more transmission of Buddhism to China from the southern sea route than previously thought. A good example is Bodhidharma, who brought Zen (Chan) Buddhism to China.

But the two schools that have been the most popular are the Pure Land and Chan (or “Zen” in its Japanese pronunciation) schools. While the other schools mentioned above developed sophisticated doctrine, these two schools have been the most popular because they represent the two main forms of *practice*. The two forms of practice are meditation (Chan), mostly for monks and nuns, and recitation (Pure Land) of the name of Buddha Omituofo (Amitabha) mostly for the lay followers.

Since the Tang period, for over a thousand years, Buddhism has endured many ups and downs but has remained one of the main religions of China. It has survived the numerous persecutions, including the latest one in the 1960s during the Cultural Revolution. However, conditions have improved since the 1970s, due to economic prosperity and the government’s easing of restrictions on religion. Buddhism has benefitted enormously within this environment. For example, the numbers of monks and nuns have increased and so has the financial support of the temples.

TAIWAN

Buddhism has enjoyed a better environment there than in mainland China, and it has become the dominant religion of this island country. Centered on a few dominant temples, such as Buddha Light Mountain (Foguang Shan), Dharma Drum Mountain (Fagu Shan), Compassion Society (Tzu Chi), and Chung Tai Monastery, Buddhism has met the needs of a prosperous contemporary society.

These institutions have built colleges and hospitals

and made concerted effort in social welfare and disaster relief work. They promote what some call “humanistic Buddhism” in their effort to emphasize the *present* life over life *after* death. This has inspired the spirit of socially-engaged Buddhism and efforts to build a “Pure Land on earth.”

VIETNAM

Buddhism entered Vietnam as early as the 2nd century C.E. via routes that stretched from India to Central Asia. As ties to China strengthened, the Chinese forms of Buddhism influenced Buddhism in Vietnam, which coexisted with and, at times, incorporated preexisting indigenous beliefs and practices.

After gaining independence from China in 968, the subsequent ruling dynasties of Le, Ly and Tran (980–1400) fully supported Buddhism. During this period, the Zen (Thien) school became the dominant form of Buddhism especially in the courts and the monasteries. Among the populace, Pure Land Buddhism centered on Buddha A-di-da (Amitabha) became widely practiced. It requires mentioning that the Theravada form of Buddhism also continues to exist in Vietnam, mostly in the south.

One of the hallmarks of Vietnamese Buddhism, particularly in the modern period, is the emphasis on participating in the affairs of the world. The French colonialists and the communists did not favor and even persecuted the Buddhists. Many of us still remember with horror the Buddhist monks who engaged in self-immolation (burning), dying in the streets of Saigon (the capital at the

time). They made the ultimate sacrifice as demonstration of their protest against the persecution directed at the Buddhists.

And during the decades of armed conflict, including the Vietnam War in which the United States was involved for nearly ten years, some Buddhist monks became actively involved in alleviating the suffering of the people. One such noted monk was Thich Nhat Hanh, who decided that monks needed to be involved in the world and who is credited with coining the now often-utilized term, “socially-engaged Buddhism.”

KOREA

Buddhism was introduced to the Korean peninsula in the 4th century from China. At the time, Korea was divided into three kingdoms, Kogurio to the north, Paekche in the southwest, and Silla in the southeast. All three actively adopted Buddhism as a way to unify their kingdom and to adopt culture and technology from China.

When the entire Korean peninsula was unified under the Silla dynasty, Buddhism received even greater support. This supportive environment led to the emergence of eminent scholar-monks who wrote first-rate commentaries on the sutras and also led to the spread of Buddhism among the populace.

One such eminent monk was Wonhyo, whose writings are considered superb and whose work influenced Buddhist thinkers in China. Wonhyo is rather unique in that he left the monkhood to get married and even had a child. He further popularized Buddhism by spreading the practice of chanting the name of Amitabha.

Buddhism lost its political support in Korea with the Joseon dynasty (1392–1897), which opted to support Confucianism. Buddhists were severely persecuted, Buddhist temples destroyed, and monks ousted. The impact of this persecution was severe, due to the fact that the Joseon dynasty lasted for about five hundred years. However, Buddhism managed to survive and has emerged in the modern period to be one of Korea's dominant religions.

Today Buddhists make up about 40 percent of the population, compared to an equal number of Christians. It is said that the Buddhists are older and live in the rural areas, compared to the Christians, who tend to be younger and live in the urban areas.

The Chogye school is the largest school of Korean Buddhism. They sponsor modern universities, such as Dongguk University, which boasts a medical school with hospitals inspired by Buddhist teachings and practice. There has been the emergence of a number of new Buddhist groups such as Won Buddhism, which seek to meet the needs of contemporary society. One such need has been the interest in meditation.

JAPAN

Buddhism first arrived in Japan in the middle of the sixth century, when King Seong of the Korean kingdom of Paekche sent some Buddhist scrolls and a small statue of a Buddha to Emperor Kinmei of Japan. This set off a struggle in Japan between the two factions of leadership, one that supported the adoption of Buddhism and the other that opposed it.

By the beginning of the 7th century the pro-

Buddhist group, led by Prince Shotoku, won out. The prince drafted the Seventeen Article Constitution that aimed to unite the burgeoning nation by adopting Buddhist principles, including the “Three Treasures” of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

The government continued to play a vital role in utilizing Buddhism as a way of uniting the nation by establishing a central temple in Nara that had administrative oversight over the regional temples throughout Japan. Monks were called upon to serve as advisers as well as to pray for the peace and prosperity of the nation.

In the 9th century, eminent monks Saicho and Kukai studied in China and returned to establish the Tendai and Shingon schools, respectively. These schools then spawned new traditions in the 12th and 13th centuries, such as the Pure Land, Zen and Nichiren schools, whose members today make up the majority of the Buddhists in Japan.

During the past 1,000 years, Buddhism has coexisted with Shinto, Japan’s indigenous religion. This has resulted in most Japanese households having both a Buddhist altar and a Shinto shrine in their homes. Buddhism has also served to produce artistic and cultural traditions including tea and flower arranging ceremonies.

Buddhism in Tibet and Mongolia

TIBET

Even though Tibet is close to India, Buddhism entered Tibet relatively late in the 7th century during the reign of

King Srong Tseng Ganpo. Buddhism helped the king to consolidate his power and to establish a strong spiritual foundation for his reign.

In Tibet, Buddhism managed to strike a cooperative relationship with the indigenous religion, Bon. This relationship has characterized some of the unique qualities of Tibetan Buddhism, which is sometimes referred to as “Bon Buddhism” and its monks as “lamas.”

By the mid-8th century, Buddhism from China had begun to make its presence felt. On the other hand, the presence of Indian Buddhism was strengthened by the arrival of the eminent monk Padmasambhava from India. This led the Tibetans to make a decision as to which form of Buddhism to adopt. They did this by holding a series of debates at Samye Monastery.

At this historical set of debates, Indian Buddhism was represented by Kamalashila and Chinese Buddhism by a Chan master, Hvasan Mahayana. The former represented a more “gradual” approach while the latter represented a more “sudden” approach to enlightenment. Both put up a great fight, and in the end the Tibetans chose Buddhism from India.

From this point on in Tibet, Indian Buddhism continued to evolve through four major schools, the Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya and Gelug. Of the four, Gelugpa is best known for its leader, whose title is the Dalai Lama. The first Dalai Lama lived in the 17th century. According to this tradition, it is thought that the previous Dalai Lama is reborn as the next Dalai Lama. Accordingly, Tenzin Gyatso, the current Dalai Lama, who is the 14th Dalai Lama, is considered to be the reincarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama.

In 1959, the current Dalai Lama had to leave Tibet due to the occupation of the Chinese military, which claimed Tibet as part of their territory. He has lived in exile in India ever since but has traveled the world to promote Buddhism and peace.

He continues to be highly respected by others, as witnessed by his being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 and the United States Congressional Gold Medal in 2007. (See his photos on pp. 14, 18, 33, 83) His numerous travels to the U.S. are filled with speaking engagements, which are attended by thousands of people of all religions.

MONGOLIA

Buddhism entered Mongolia in a piecemeal fashion starting in the early centuries of the first millennium C.E. from the various adjacent regions, such as Nepal and Central Asia. Then, it was in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) when the Mongols ruled China that the emperors converted to the Tibetan form of Buddhism. Buddhism became the state religion of the Mongol empire.

After the end of the Yuan dynasty, the Mongols reverted to their indigenous shamanistic form of religion. Later, in the 16th century, Mongolia once again turned to Buddhism as its religious foundation through the efforts of rulers such as Altan Khan. It was he who recognized the leader of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism and bestowed upon him the title “Dalai Lama”; this title has survived to the present, with the 14th Dalai Lama as mentioned earlier. As these close ties with Tibetan Buddhism show, Buddhism played a dominant role among the Mongols through the Yuan period.

During the Qing dynasty (1635–1912) in China, the ruling people, the Manchus, supported the Tibetan form of Buddhism. However, the Qing rulers used Buddhism mostly as a means of controlling the Mongolians and Tibetans. Nevertheless, Buddhism has continued to play an important role in the spiritual lives of many ordinary Mongolians into the modern period. Since the overthrow of the Communists in 1990, there has been a resurgence of Buddhism. In 2010, 53 percent of Mongolians identified themselves as Buddhists.⁶

From Asia to the United States

As we have seen in this chapter, Buddhism spread eastward through much of Asia over the past 2,600 years. However, during the same time Buddhism did not travel westward from the Indian subcontinent to take root in Europe or North America as a living religion for a large number of people.

Finally, starting in the 19th century, Buddhism climbed over the “Western wall” to establish itself as a living religion among diverse groups of people, particularly in the United States. And the Buddhism that arrived in the United States came from *all* of the Asian countries that were described above.

6. 2010 Population and Housing Census of Mongolia. Data recorded in Brian J. Grim et al., *Yearbook of International Religious Demography 2014*. BRILL, 2014. p. 152.

Chapter 4

Brief History of Buddhism in America

The history of Buddhism in America is longer than most people imagine. As will be discussed below, it began in 1844 on the East Coast among the intellectuals. This type of Buddhism was transmitted from Europe, where scholars had been studying and learning about Buddhism for about one hundred years. We can, perhaps, call this “intellectual” Buddhism, which was confined to professors and intellectuals. So, Buddhism had not become a “living” religion among the ordinary people.

In contrast, “living” Buddhism arrived on the West Coast of the United States with the Chinese and Japanese immigrants who brought Buddhism as their religion. As Buddhists, they built temples, which served as religious and cultural centers as they began their new lives in the new land.

We will now take an overview of the development of Buddhism in the United States. It can generally be divided into three periods, though the first period and the second period partially overlap. Also, we can regard the

first period as representing, in general, the so-called “intellectual” Buddhism, whereas the second and third periods point to “living” Buddhism.

First period

The first period began in 1844 when a chapter from the *Lotus Sutra*, an important Mahayana Buddhist text, was translated from French into English. The translator was a woman named, Elizabeth Peabody. In the same year Professor Edward Salisbury of Yale University delivered the first comprehensive paper on Buddhism at the annual conference of the American Oriental Society.

In the world of American literature, writers made references to Buddhism and other Asian religions. They included such famous people in American history as Ralph Emerson, Walt Whitman and Henry Thoreau. After the death of Henry Thoreau in 1862, his friend recalled him as having lived like a Buddhist monk in meditation, untroubled by negative emotions.¹

Soon more Americans became interested in Buddhism, such as Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) and Paul Carus (1852–1919). Both of them devoted the latter part of their lives to propagating Buddhism. Carus produced numerous publications through his Open Court publishing house, while Olcott traveled to Sri Lanka and became a Buddhist in 1880. He later contributed to the revival of Buddhism in that country.

1. Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake* (Shambala, 1981), pp. 60, 64.

An epoch-making event was the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. It was an eye-opening encounter for many Americans, who for the first time came face-to-face with the living representatives of Buddhist and other Asian religions. They were surprised since they had largely imagined them to be relics or artifacts of the *past*.

To the contrary, Soen Shaku from Japan, Anagarika Dharmapala of Sri Lanka, and others were not only impressive figures, but also presented Buddhism as a *modern* religion more in keeping with science than Christianity. After the parliament Dharmapala made more trips to the United States over the years to lecture on Buddhism, and Soen Shaku sent his disciple D. T. Suzuki to reside in the United States. Suzuki went on to make enormous contributions to the understanding of Buddhism, Zen in particular.

Second period

Though it overlaps in time with the first period to some extent, the second period refers to “living” Buddhism brought over by Chinese and Japanese in the second half of the 19th century. They established numerous temples, mostly on the West Coast, serving as important centers of their religious and community life. The Chinese built the first Buddhist temple in 1853 in San Francisco, and more were built throughout the western United States wherever large Chinese communities existed.

By the closing years of the 19th century, Chinese Buddhist temples began to dwindle in numbers. This was

due to the decline in the Chinese population stemming from discriminatory laws that prevented further Chinese immigration, particularly of women. Also, there were very few priests associated with these temples to provide the professional leadership necessary for the temples to endure and prosper in the new environment.

The group that kept “living” Buddhism alive was the Japanese, who began to establish temples in large numbers, first in Hawaii and the West Coast states. The Japanese differed from the Chinese in that the headquarters of the various Buddhist denominations in Japan sent professional priests as missionaries to the new land. Further, more women were able to accompany the men in the United States, enabling them to start families, which soon led to the need for religious institutions for their American children.

These sets of dynamics allowed the Japanese Buddhists to grow in numbers through the first half of the 20th century and even throughout the war with Japan (1941–1945). Ironically, the hostile environment of the larger society contributed to making the temples even more of an important emotional and social gathering place for the immigrants and their American children. This became nowhere more true when the majority of people of Japanese ancestry were forcibly placed in internment camps during the war.²

The Japanese Buddhists, thus, managed to prosper

2. For an excellent book on this topic, see Ducan Ryuken Williams, *American Sutra: A Story of Faith and Freedom in the Second World War* (Harvard University Press, 2019). The book focuses on how the Buddhists fought to retain their faith in the face of interment.

and actively keep the torch of Dharma lit throughout the first half of the century. This was in the face of the decline in the number of Chinese Buddhists for reasons previously mentioned.

Further, the European American Buddhists who had originally taken an interest in Buddhism began to weaken and wane in numbers. This was due, in part, to the growing perception that Buddhism was too pessimistic and not active enough for the American mentality.

Third period

The third period began soon after the Second World War and continues into the present. It is characterized most prominently by its *dramatic* growth. This period encompasses two movements, the convert movement and, separately, the new Asian American Buddhists. Converts are those who grew up as Christian, Jewish or with no religion but who become Buddhist as adults by personal choice.

And it was in this period, especially among the converts, that the earlier perception of Buddhism as pessimistic and inactive was dramatically changed to one of *optimism* and *activism*. It is thought that this was, in large part, the outcome of greater emphasis on *practice*, such as meditation and chanting. These practices of meditation and chanting spiritually energized the practitioners to a greater degree than the mere intellectual understanding of Buddhism that was dominant in the earlier periods among the converts and the interested.

Among the convert Buddhists were those associated with the so-called “Beat Buddhism” of the 1950s,

represented by famous poets and writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder. They criticized the materialism or the over-emphasis on money and material things found in modern American life. They called for Americans to value the spiritual dimension of their lives. They paved the way for more full-fledged American Buddhist groups in the 1960s and 1970s.

These American Buddhist groups include Tibetan institutions such as the Nyingma Institute, founded by Tarthang Tulku; Shambhala International, founded by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche; the San Francisco Zen Center, founded by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi; and the Insight Meditation Society, founded by Americans Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, and Jacqueline Schwartz. These institutions make up the “convert Buddhists whose main practice is meditation” mentioned earlier. (See Appendix III: “Various Buddhist Traditions in the United States.”)

This convert group also includes Soka Gakkai International–USA, which makes up the “convert Buddhists whose main practice is chanting” discussed above. Since its beginnings in 1960, this organization was often criticized in the early stages for its aggressive style of converting people to their faith and its exclusive attitude of not actively associating with other Buddhist groups. But with these features not as strong as before, Soka Gakkai has succeeded in creating an organization that today has the largest number of members for a *single* organization. Further, it is racially the most diverse among the four Buddhist groups, and it best reflects the racial makeup of the general American population.

The other feature of the third period is the enormous growth of the second of the four groups of American Buddhists, the “new Asian American Buddhists.” Their numbers surged with the change in the immigration law in 1965 that allowed much larger Asian immigration from Korea, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Thai and the other Southeast Asian countries.

The Buddhists of this group now far outnumber the “older Asian American Buddhists,” made up of Chinese and Japanese descent. This constitutes a huge change, since before World War II there were very few people from Korea, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam and the other Southeast Asian countries in the United States. They had been prevented from coming to America on account of the political and economic conditions in their home countries as well as the American immigration laws.

Their arrival has greatly increased the number of Buddhists in America, since Buddhists make up the majority of the people in virtually all of these countries. This is particularly true of Vietnamese American Buddhists, who perhaps number at least around half a million. Despite the unimaginable hardships endured during the Vietnam War (1955–1973), many have built productive lives in the United States often centered on their Buddhist temples or pagodas.

Important Events in American Buddhist History

Having painted an overview of how Buddhism developed in the United States, I wish to conclude this chapter by listing some of the important historical events that have

shaped the overall character of American Buddhism. For important events shaping each of the many Buddhist traditions, you are asked to refer to their respective history.³

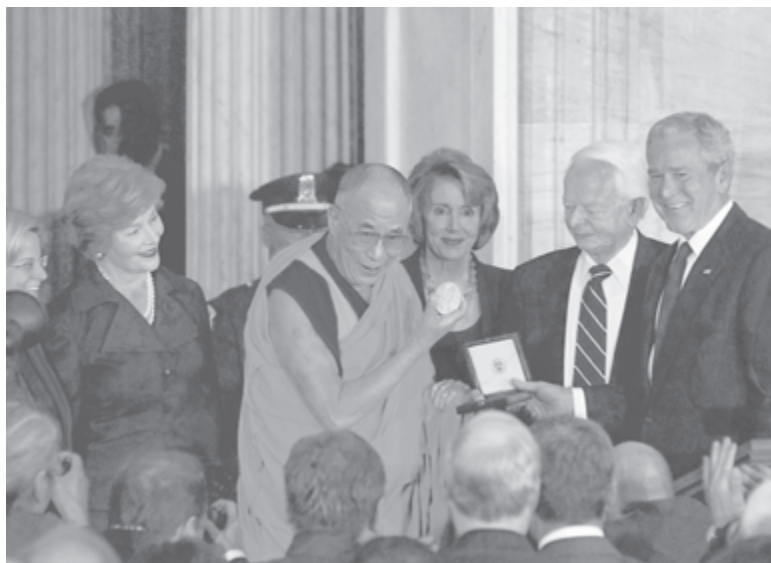
- 1844 Prof. Edward Salisbury of Yale University presents a paper on the history of Buddhism at the gathering of the American Oriental Society held in Boston. (May 28)
- 1844 Ms. Elizabeth Peabody translates a chapter in the *Lotus Sutra* from French into English.
- 1853 Kong Chow Temple, the first Buddhist temple in America, is built in San Francisco. By 1875, there were eight temples in Chinatown, and by the end of the 1800s there were hundreds of Chinese temples throughout the West Coast.
- 1875 The Theosophical Society was established in New York under the leadership of Henry Steel Olcott and Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, who in 1880 became the first American converts to Buddhism in a ceremony held in Colombo, Sri Lanka. (May 25) Olcott's book, *Buddhist Catechism*, published in 1881, becomes a widely read book in the Buddhist world.
- 1879 Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, a biography of the Buddha in verse was published. This hugely popular book in English sold over half a

3. I am greatly indebted to The Pluralism Project, Harvard University for the references listed in this section. For further details, see <http://pluralism.org/timeline/buddhism-in-america/>

million copies in eighty editions and gave many Americans their first exposure to Buddhism.

- 1889 Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii is established in Hawaii, the first of many Buddhist groups from Asia to send their priests as missionaries.
- 1890 Ernest Fenollosa and William Bigelow, Harvard University graduates, return to Boston after spending several years in Japan, where they underwent a ceremony to become Buddhists. They brought back precious Buddhist and Japanese artifacts, which now form part of the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.
- 1893 Buddhist representatives from Sri Lanka, Thailand, Japan and other Asian countries attend the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. (September 11–29)
- 1942 Rev. Issei Matsuura, a Jodo Shinshu priest, is arrested and later placed in internment camp along with 110,000 Japanese Americans, of whom 60 percent were Buddhist. (February 28)
- 1949 Dr. D. T. Suzuki returns to the U.S. from Japan and contributes to the popularity of Zen starting in the 1950s.
- 1958 Jack Kerouac's famous novel, *The Dharma Bums*, is published, signifying impact of Buddhism in popular American culture.

- 1962 The San Francisco Zen Center is established, one of the earliest and most significant American Buddhist organizations comprised mostly of convert Buddhists.
- 1966 The Institute of Buddhist Studies: Graduate School and Seminary, Berkeley, California becomes the first Buddhist seminary for training priests for its sponsoring organization, the Buddhist Churches of America.
- 1974 The first Buddhist-based liberal arts college, Naropa Institute, was established in Boulder, Colorado with undergraduate and graduate programs in Buddhist studies, contemplative psychology, performing arts, etc.
- 1985 The Institute of Buddhist Studies: Graduate School and Seminary becomes the first institution of higher learning to be certified by the Dept. of Defense to train Buddhist chaplains for the American armed forces.
- 1991 The first issue of “Tricycle: the Buddhist Review,” a non-denominational magazine was published in New York with nation-wide distribution.
- 2007 Representatives Mazie Hirono of Hawaii and Hank Johnson of Georgia become the first Buddhists to serve in the history of U.S. Congress.



The Dalai Lama receiving the Congressional Gold Medal. Photo by Don Farber.

2007 Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor of the United States, is awarded to the Dalai Lama, a Buddhist monk, at a ceremony in the presence of the U.S. President and the Congressional leaders. (October 17)

Part Two

Basic Teachings and Practices with Humor and Light-hearted Stories

Chapter 5

Four Noble Truths

Four Noble Truths and the Greedy Dog

Among the Buddha's teachings, the most basic and important are the Four Noble Truths. That is the reason why they were the topic of the Buddha's first sermon, which, if you recall, he gave to the five monks.

And we are told that soon after Buddha's sermon ended, all five of the monks had attained Awakening. So, the Four Noble Truths were the very teaching that led to the Awakening of his first disciples. This was significant because it proved that his teaching was effective not only for himself but for other people as well.

The Four Noble Truths also give us the bird's-eye view or the road map of the Buddha's overall teachings. In other words, it's a great place to start. The Four Noble Truths are usually expressed as follows:

The first truth of suffering

The second truth of the cause of suffering

The third truth of cessation
The fourth truth of the path

However, I would like to restate these truths in ways that are easier to understand:

First truth: We all experience suffering.

Second truth: The cause of our suffering lies
in our attachments.

Third truth: Our suffering ceases when
Awakening is realized.

Fourth truth: There is the Eightfold Noble Path
for realizing Awakening.

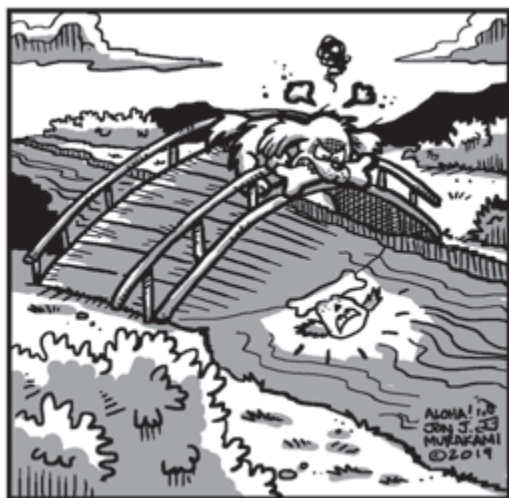
Now, let us see if we can make the Four Noble Truths, especially the first two, more understandable. I find that stories are very effective for that. There are many traditional Buddhist stories, but I shall utilize a story that many of you are more familiar with.¹ Plus, the story is in keeping with the tone of this book to be as lighthearted and humorous as possible.

1. Buddhism spread across vast areas to become a world religion because it succeeded in adapting ideas and stories, which were originally not “Buddhist” but were familiar to the new people in the new culture.

Aesop's fable of "The Greedy Dog"

The famous Aesop's fable of "The Greedy Dog" is a great way to understand the Four Noble Truths. Once upon a time, a hungry old dog saw a puppy carrying a juicy bone in its mouth. Greedy for the puppy's treat, the old dog barked and growled until the poor puppy got scared, dropped the bone, and ran away. The old dog carried the juicy bone in its mouth and looked around to find a quiet place to eat it.

On his way to a quiet place, he walked over a bridge, and as he looked over its side he saw *another* dog with a bone in its mouth. Not realizing that the other dog he saw was actually him reflected in the water, he became greedy for *another* bone and barked at the other dog. As he did, "splash" went his own bone as it fell into the river, leaving the dog with no bone, hungry once again. No doubt, this greedy dog was suffering.



First truth: We all experience suffering

Buddhism is sometimes accused of being too “pessimistic” precisely because there is much talk about suffering, as is seen here. But isn’t it the role of any true religion to face up to and overcome suffering? The overall purpose of Buddhism has been “to *eliminate* suffering and to bring about true happiness.”

The first of the Four Noble Truths states, “We all experience suffering.” Isn’t that the truth! Even young teenagers can agree with this, for while there is much happiness in life, there is also much suffering.

The Buddha specified eight kinds of suffering, which are:

- 1) birth
- 2) aging
- 3) illness
- 4) death
- 5) having to meet up with people and situations we don’t like
- 6) having to separate from people and situations we like
- 7) not getting what we want
- 8) being attached to the five physical-psychological components that make up our experience

Now, let us look at the each of these sufferings. As we do this, you might ask, “Why is birth a form of suffering?” After all, when a baby is born the family and friends all celebrate the arrival of new life. The answer to this re-

quires more space, so we will come back to this a bit later. Having so said, I'd like to ask you to begin thinking why "birth" is considered suffering in Buddhism.

Compared to birth, it is easy to see how aging, illness and death are considered suffering. Remember, it was seeing an old person, a sick person and a deceased person that shocked and pained the prince who later became the Buddha. These experiences motivated him to leave his family and comfortable life to seek the spiritual path.

As for the 5th suffering of "having to face people and situations we don't like," we saw a perfect example of it with in the story of the Greedy Dog. There the puppy experienced this suffering when he faced the greedy dog that frightened him and ended up taking his bone. In our lives, examples of this 5th suffering include having to do that dreaded homework, losing a close sports match, and having to be in the same class or team with people we don't like or whom we might even hate. What are other examples of this kind of suffering that *you* can think of?

The 6th suffering of "having to separate from people and situations we like" also takes place often in our lives. For example, it includes having to say goodbye to our loved ones. We have done that when our grandparents passed away or when we parted ways from our girlfriend or boyfriend when we still cared for him or her. Also, some of us had to leave a school or neighborhood that we loved on account of our family moving far away.

Next, the greedy dog's plight applies to the 7th suffering, "not getting what we want." He wanted the bone so badly that he went so far as to steal the bone from a

puppy. However, he lost even that bone to the river, leaving him in the state of suffering, for he was again “without what he wanted.”

Finally, let us look at the 8th suffering, that of “attachment to the five physical-psychological functions (or aggregates).” This one is a bit harder to understand for it looks at suffering from a more objective and psychological perspective.

These five functions that make up our experiences are the 1) body and five senses, 2) feelings, 3) thoughts, 4) intention, and 5) consciousness. According to the Buddha, we suffer because our five functions are tainted by our attachment or G.A.S. (greed, anger/hatred and stupidity).

For example, when the greedy dog saw and smelled the juicy bone through his *senses* of sight and smell, it was followed by pleasant *feelings* about the bone, which generated a desire for it. This feeling then led to his *thoughts* of determining that he could easily overpower the tiny puppy in order to snatch its bone. And then he raised the *intention* of taking it away from the puppy. Finally, the fifth function, *consciousness*, includes the decision he made to take the bone away based on his awareness of the previous four functions.²

It was the self-centered attachments of greed and stupidity (two of G.A.S.) that led to the greedy dog wanting the bone (feelings), knowing that he could overpower

2. I am explaining this complex teaching of “attachment to the five physical-psychological functions (or aggregates)” in ways that are easier to understand for our readers.

er the puppy (thoughts), then wanting to scaring and snatching away the bone from the puppy (intention), and finally making the decision (consciousness). While the greedy dog was experiencing all this, he was not at all at peace or happy; his greed and aggressive actions made him very anxious and agitated.

Certainly, he ended up suffering a lot when he dropped the bone into the river. He suffered a great deal because he became greatly agitated, frustrated and regretful.

We must remember that it wasn't only the greedy dog that suffered, for the poor puppy also suffered. The puppy became terrified and upset when the greedy dog growled at him and stole the bone the puppy had looked forward to chewing. This goes to show that our action impacts not only our own happiness but also that of others.

Second truth: The cause of our suffering lies in our attachment or clinging

As we look at the second of the Four Noble Truths, I wish to begin with a well-known American Buddhist joke that was mentioned earlier. (See p. 26 for the cartoon)

A: Why couldn't the Buddha vacuum clean under the sofa?

B: I don't know.

A: Well, it's because the Buddha had no *attachments*!

Allow me to explain even if you got it. As an Awakened person, the Buddha no longer has any attachments

or G.A.S. (greed, anger/hatred and stupidity). At the same time, “attachments” also refer to the gadgets that are attached to the end of the vacuum cleaner for reaching narrow spaces such as under a sofa. That is why the Buddha had no *attachments* to get to the narrow space! I hope you got it.

This second truth emphasizes the fact that our suffering is caused by G.A.S. This was obvious in the case of the greedy dog, for it was because of his greed and stupidity that he suffered the loss of his bone. His greed also brought great suffering and misery to the puppy.

In the case of Prince Siddhartha, before he became the Buddha, he experienced extreme suffering upon witnessing a dead person. And his pain and suffering was due to his desire (or greed) to want to live, or in his own words, due to his “craving for existence.” And this was compounded by his ignorance (or stupidity) about the truth of impermanence, that is, that everything including our body changes and eventually ceases to exist.

Now, we can certainly empathize with Prince Siddhartha, because everyone desires to live a long time and to be in good health. However, no matter how common and universal the thirst for life is, it is still *greed*, nevertheless. This truth (that desire to live is, indeed, greed) discovered by the Buddha will probably be hard to swallow for many of us.

It certainly was for me, when I was rudely awakened in my sophomore year in high school that we all have to die. I vividly recall feeling that it was unfair, and that it wasn’t how it was supposed to be. And the Buddhist teaching wasn’t much of a consolation *initially* when it

reminded me that my discomfort with death was due to my greed and attachment to life.

However, the teaching has since helped me to see that the roots of my suffering regarding death lie within *myself*. It was my greed and stupidity (or ignorance) that were preventing me from having the wisdom to see and live in accord with the truth: everything changes and comes to an end, including my body.

So, my suffering was due to my failure to develop the wisdom or awaken to truth. This may differ a bit from Christianity, where suffering stems from our “sin,” due to our failure to keep our promise or covenant with God. Buddhism values wisdom to see truth, while it seems to me that Christianity values humans’ relationship to God. However, in the end, the values of the two religions can be seen to be similar, since God for Christians is truth, and wisdom for Buddhists is to awaken to truth.

Third truth: Our suffering ceases when Awakening is realized

Now, let’s move to the third truth, which states that our suffering ceases when Awakening is realized. Awakening is the state realized by the Buddha under the Bodhi tree, and is also known as “nirvana.”

“Nirvana” literally means “blown out.” So it is the state when the fire of attachments or G.A.S. has been blown out. You can now find “nirvana” in your dictionary as an *English* word and it has come to mean “extreme happiness, bliss, freedom and/or liberation.”

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was, as previously

mentioned, an internationally famous American rock band called “Nirvana.” When asked why they settled on that name for his band, the singer and guitarist Kurt Cobain answered that he “wanted a name that was kind of beautiful or nice and pretty instead of a mean, raunchy punk name....” In that same article of the interview, Nirvana is described as “transformed state of personality characterized by compassion, peace, deep spiritual joy and an absence of negative mental states and emotions such as doubt, worry, anxiety and fear.”³

To better understand this state of Awakening or nirvana, I wish to share another well-known American Buddhist joke.

A Buddhist monk wanted a hot dog, so he walked over to a hot dog vendor on a busy street corner. The vendor asked, “What would you like, sir?” The monk answered, “Make me *one* with *everything*!”

To make sure you got it, let me explain. The conventional meaning is that he wanted one hot dog with all the condiments, which include mustard, ketchup, diced onion, pickle relish, and sauerkraut: in other words, “make me *one* [hot dog] *with everything* [on it].”

But the deeper meaning points to a religious experience wherein a person feels at “unity with” or “one with” other people, nature and the universe (“everything”), associated with the state of Awakening; so in other words, “*make me one* with everything.”

3. Briony Edwards, “Nirvana: Everything you need to know.” <https://www.loudersound.com/features/nirvana-everything-you-need-to-know>:

The Buddha experienced a profound realization in which he no longer saw himself as being separate and alone but connected to everything around him as in our metaphor of Indra's Net of Jewels. Within this experience of interconnectedness, the Buddha now saw clearly 1) the nature of suffering, 2) the cause of suffering, and 3) the path to overcoming suffering. This Awakening revealed that change had to come from within himself.

Now here comes the follow up to the joke about the monk and a hot dog, which directly illustrates the present topic. Well, after getting the hot dog, the monk gives the vendor a \$20 bill, but even though a minute passed, he did not get the change back.

The monk waited patiently for a while but when it was not forthcoming, the monk became a bit flustered and finally asked, "Well, where is my change?" The vendor squarely faced the monk and replied with confidence,



“Sir, the *change* must come from *within you*,” as he pointed his index finger toward the Buddhist monk!

The monk wanted “change” as *in money*, but the vendor switched the meaning of “change” to mean *transforming* the mind or Awakening. And the joke becomes funnier since the roles are reversed. It should be the monk telling the vendor. However, it is the hot dog vendor telling the monk what the monk should already know: Awakening involves *change* in the way we see things in accordance with truth. And it is this change that leads to the jewel within each of us to shine forth!

Fourth: There is the Eightfold Noble Path for realizing Awakening

This Awakening or nirvana is realized by practicing the fourth truth. This road map is called the Eightfold Noble Path. What are the eight? They are:

Right View
Right Intention
Right Speech
Right Conduct
Right Livelihood
Right Effort
Right Mindfulness
Right Concentration

We shall in subsequent chapters explore each of these for they deserve to be discussed in greater depth. (See Chapter 6) For now, the list gives us a sense of what is required in order to attain Awakening.

So, between the fourth and the third truths, there also exists a cause and effect relationship. By practicing the Eightfold Noble Path (the fourth truth) one can achieve nirvana or Awakening (the third truth), when suffering ends or is overcome.

For those who have a hard time remembering all eight parts of the Eightfold Noble Path, I'd like to share a tip that one of my teachers taught us for remembering them. He said to think of a German name, Mr. V. I. SCLEMM (pronounced "Shlem"); for example, "V" stands for "View" and "I" stands for "Intention" and so on! It's certainly helped *me* to remember the eight. I hope that it can help you as well.

Summarizing the Four Noble Truths

So, the Four Noble Truths are comprised of two sets of cause and effect relationships. The second truth is the *cause* of the first truth, and the fourth truth is the *cause* of the third truth. And, most importantly, when the third truth (Awakening) is attained, the first truth (suffering) ceases.

When we evaluate the Four Noble Truths, they are quite *scientific* in nature. They do not require us to believe in something that we cannot experience in our lives. They tell us that we experience suffering, and then proceed to tell us what the causes are.

And then they show us how we can think, speak, and act in the right way; this is Karma. Karma means "our *action* in how we act, speak and think" (Three Actions). Its original meaning was not "fate," although it has come to be understood that way today. So if our Karma or action

is in keeping with the Four Noble Truths, we are able to reduce our suffering as well as that of others.

Now, let's see if we can summarize the Four Noble Truths by taking a final look at the greedy dog. Well, some of you may be saying to yourselves, "What a stupid, greedy dog!" But are *we* so different? Don't we sometimes find ourselves in the same situation? Aren't we swept away by our greed for more and more things?

As a result, we see some of our parents being overburdened with huge debts and overtime work that put undue pressure on them and on their relationships with other people, including you. So, they end up not having enough time to spend with you and the other family members, with their friends, and with each other. Not having enough time for each other, some couples grow distant and their relationships end up in divorce. Or the stressful life can take a toll on the mind and body, leading to psychological and physical problems.

We could blame our greed on how our consumer-oriented society that forces us to spend-and-spend and buy-and-buy. Certainly, we have one of the richest societies in the history of humankind, where some middle-class people are able to live in four bedroom homes with three car garages. And many of these houses are located miles away from places of work, school, and shopping, requiring multiple cars and a lot of gasoline. Our life style leads us to spend and consume enormously. And if we are not careful, it can bury us under the weight of our greed. One such serious outcome is the devastating effects of climate change.

But to travel the Buddhist path means to be self-

directed, not simply to blame others or the economic system, and not to feel victimized. We can choose our own life style as well as help to change the system to encourage a life style of less consumption. We can do that in the spirit of engaged Buddhism, in which we are inspired to take the teachings from the personal level and apply them to the societal level.

And, of course, we can and we should on a personal level work to control our G.A.S. We could let our greed, anger/hatred and stupidity get out of control, like the greedy dog, and suffer. The greedy dog should not have acted out on his greed to take the bone away from the puppy.

Or we can apply the Four Noble Truths to our lives, to see the various temptations in our lives, and take appropriate measures, as found in the Eightfold Noble Path. This is why the Buddha stressed the Four Noble Truths, as the following scriptural passage indicates:

All those who are seeking Awakening must understand the Four Noble Truths. Without understanding these, they will wander about interminably in the bewildering maze of life's illusions. Those who understand these Four Noble Truths are called "the people who have acquired the eyes of Awakening."
(*Itihivuttaka*)

Whether we suffer or not is up to each of us. This idea is expressed in a somewhat humorous line, "Suffering is optional," which has become quite a popular phrase found in books and on television.

Actually, I first came across these words among the graffiti on a wall in, of all places, a public restroom! I could not help blurt out laughing when I found such a statement of truth on a restroom wall. It read:

“Suffering is optional!”

Now, I have since added “Difficulties are mandatory,” so as to read, “Difficulties are mandatory, but suffering is optional!” We all know that difficulties are inevitable in life, but by practicing the Four Noble Truths they do not necessarily have to become *my* suffering, thus, “suffering is optional.” So, suffering is up to you.

A lesson to be learned from the Four Noble Truths

We wish to conclude with a very important lesson we can learn from the Four Noble Truths, and that is this: by learning to let go or reduce our G.A.S., we can reduce our suffering for ourselves and for others. This is an optimistic message even though we, as persons leading ordinary lives in the modern world, would not be able to *completely* let go or eliminate G.A.S. as did the Buddha.

Nevertheless, by putting the Four Noble Truths into practice, there will be a real difference in our lives. This difference will become clear the more we put them into action in our daily lives.

In this regard, we should not misunderstand the aim of the Four Noble Truths. Just because the first truth has to do with suffering, it does not mean that it’s the most important or is the conclusion. Instead, the Four Noble

Truths *conclude* with Awakening (the third truth) or nirvana, which is none other than “ultimate happiness, bliss, freedom and/or liberation.”

This misunderstanding often becomes the basis for many people, especially those of other religions, who see Buddhism to be overly negative and pessimistic. However, if the critics were correct, Buddhism would not have inspired and brought happiness to millions of people for twenty-six centuries. Such true happiness is also reflected in the peaceful smiles and faces on the artistic images of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas!

Chapter 6

Karma and the Eightfold Noble Path

A Stolen Car

Let's begin with a humorous episode between a Buddhist named Stephen, a relative newcomer to Buddhism, and his Buddhist priest.

STEPHEN: Can you bless my new car?

BUDDHIST PRIEST: What benefits do you hope to get from a blessing?

STEPHEN: I want nothing bad to happen to my brand-new car.

BUDDHIST PRIEST: We don't usually do blessings since they go against our teachings, but if you really insist, I shall do it as a pastoral service to give you peace of mind.

(A few weeks later, Stephen returns, really upset, to tell the priest that the car was stolen.)

STEPHEN: Reverend, my car was stolen yesterday! I feel that your blessing didn't work.

BUDDHIST PRIEST: I'm very sorry to hear that, but that blessing doesn't work for stolen cars; it works *only* for preventing the car from getting into an accident!

This episode is meant to point out the folly of relying on religion to prevent bad things from happening to us. Buddhism, or any religion for that matter, cannot control or determine what happens to us. What is important in Buddhism is not *what happens* to us but *how we experience* life. So in this case, religion cannot prevent the car from being stolen or also from getting into a car accident but can help us mentally and spiritually to deal better with the misfortunes of life.

And how we experience our lives depends on the quality of the jewel of wisdom within ourselves. This wisdom can also be expressed as “understanding,” “view,” or “insight.” Whatever we call it, Buddhism encourages us to cultivate it.

What Karma Is Not

Before moving on to discuss the ways of cultivating the jewel of wisdom within, we would like to discuss the teaching of Karma. It is a well-known word but often highly *misunderstood* and *misused*. Let's use the example of the stolen car.

A wrong use of the word is to say that it was Stephen's

Karma that the car was stolen, meaning that the theft of the car was due to “fate” or “predestination.” So, based on this way of thinking, no matter how much Stephen had taken steps to secure his car by always locking it and parking in safe places, his car was “fated” or “predetermined” to be stolen.

Another wrong understanding of Karma is to think that Stephen was being punished for something “bad” he had done recently. Actually, a few days before his car was stolen, Stephen was so upset over his team’s loss in overtime in an important basketball match that he took out his frustration on others. He purposely stepped on a bug on the sidewalk and yelled at the family dog! However, these did not *directly cause* Stephen’s car from being stolen. The stolen car was not a punishment for his bad behavior.

In my understanding of Buddhism, there are two basic categories of cause and effect: 1) objective conditions and 2) personal Karma. Stephen getting his car stolen was a result of the first category but not the second. The objective conditions point to a myriad of circumstances that contributed to the car being stolen.

These include the fact that Stephen’s car matched perfectly what the burglar was looking for and the burglar happened to have exactly the right tools for disarming the alarm system on Stephen’s car. So, the causes leading to Stephen’s car getting stolen are so innumerable that we are unable to identify them all. However, one thing is clear: the car was not stolen due to Stephen’s personal Karma.

The Real Meaning of Karma

What then is personal Karma? Karma means “action.” This action takes three forms or Three Actions: 1) intentional thoughts, 2) speech, and 3) bodily action. In other words, Karma refers to what a person does, says and thinks, primarily in the religious context of cultivating oneself.¹ Actually, Karma is very optimistic, because it encourages us to cultivate ourselves religiously and morally to be the best we can be. This clearly differs from the notion of fate, which is clearly pessimistic.

Second, Karma is applied primarily to *oneself* (first person). It should not be a means of judging others (third person), especially to explain why *other* people find themselves in unfortunate situations. So, we should not be saying to Stephen, “Oh, too bad, but that was your Karma,” implying that he was fated or that he was being punished. Karma should not be the tool for *judging others*.

Unfortunately, in the long history of Buddhism, Karma was used to explain the reasons for the plight of others. For example, the outcastes, the poor, and even the disabled were told to accept and resign themselves to their condition because they were told they were suffering due to their past actions, including in previous lives.

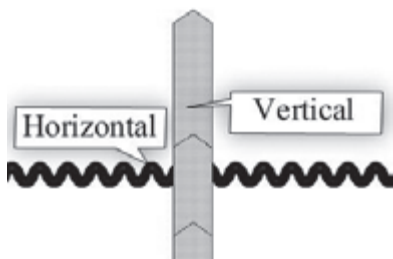
1. This does not mean that there is a religious realm separate from the everyday realm but rather points to the importance of one’s motivation and the manner in which the actions are carried out. Karma needs to be framed within one’s attempt to polish that jewel within for spiritual Awakening and to improve oneself by behaving ethically.

We have so far talked mostly about what personal Karma is *not*, so let us now discuss in greater detail what personal Karma *is*. As previously said, Karma refers to what a person does, says and thinks, primarily in the religious context of cultivating oneself toward the realization of Awakening.

When applied to Stephen's case, had he been cultivating himself he would have been better able to cope with the loss of his car. Instead, he was extremely upset, felt victimized and even blamed others, including the priest even though the priest had explained to Stephen that blessings do not play any part in the main purpose of Buddhism.

If Stephen had been studying the teachings to cultivate his thoughts, speech and bodily actions, he would have responded to the stolen car without being as upset and blaming others, and he might even have felt grateful that the situation wasn't worse. He was not physically hurt, which was a real possibility had he been around the car during the burglary. So with a spiritually mature personal Karma, Stephen would have shown greater calm, understanding and even gratitude.

If you like, imagine a diagram that looks like a cross, with a *horizontal* axis and a *vertical* axis. The horizontal axis represents the objective conditions in which we live, our daily lives of family, school, work and society. This axis is wavy to represent the bumpy nature of our existence.



Many people have *only* this axis or dimension, which makes them subject to the ups and downs of their bumpy lives.

But those who cultivate their personal Karma possess a firm and stable *vertical* axis. They are better able to deal effectively with the ups and downs on their horizontal axis or their objective conditions. For example, if he had had a firm vertical axis, Stephen would not have become so upset, and he wouldn't have felt victimized or blamed others. He would naturally have been unhappy for having lost his car, but his anger would not have been so intense and lasted so long, and it wouldn't have impacted the rest of his daily life so negatively. In other words, his inner jewel would have shined brighter.

The Eightfold Noble Path

The question now is to ask what are the ways for cultivating good Karma, thus enabling the jewel within to shine brighter. In Buddhism, there are a number of ways, but the most well-known is the Eightfold Noble Path. What are the eight that make up the Eightfold Noble Path? They are Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

They can be seen as representing each of the eight spokes of the Wheel of Dharma, one of the main symbols of Buddhism. Its importance is seen, for example, in the Scouts' award medals, the Sangha and Metta Awards. (See Appendix VI)

These eight parts of the Path should not be seen as *stages*, where each one is completed before moving on to the next. Instead, all eight are practiced together as a set, as they complement and support each other.



Also, the Noble Path is not so much a set of commandments as it is a set of self-imposed guidelines for those seeking to experience greater meaning and fulfillment in life. It is voluntary and not something commanded by some external force from above or by a religious institution.

Further, each of the eight is referred to as “right,” but they are not meant to be “right” as opposed to “wrong” in the *moral sense*. Instead, “right” is meant in the sense of being “appropriate” in keeping with truth, which then helps a person to lessen suffering and experience greater happiness.

In this sense, these are not *absolute* rules to be applied in *all* cases, *all* the time. At times we are unable to live up *fully* to the ideals of the Noble Path. This is true for those of us who are not living in a pristine and pure environment like the monks and nuns. So, I recommend that we apply these ideals in the spirit of “I shall *try* my best to carry them out” because life situations are not always black and white.

1) RIGHT VIEW

Right View refers to our *understanding* of the Four Noble Truths and other Buddhist principles such as the Four

Marks of Life.² Since we have already discussed the Four Noble Truths, you are requested to refer to the earlier discussions for details. (See Chapter 5)

As for the Four Marks of Life, they can be expressed in more “everyday” terms as, 1) “Life is a bumpy road,” 2) “Life is interdependent,” 3) “Life is impermanent,” and 4) “Life can be great.” You are asked to refer to the next chapter, which is devoted to the Four Marks of Life. (See Chapter 7 for greater details)

2) RIGHT INTENTION

Right Intention points to the *promise* we make to conduct our lives based on Right View. Right View was our understanding, but Right Intention is our firm promise to put our understanding into practice in our everyday lives.

Right View is the theory and Right Intention is our promise to put that theory into practice. In any sport, we learn the basic rules of the game (= theory) from the coach, but as we play the game we must have the strong intention to follow the rules (= promise).

3) RIGHT SPEECH

Right Speech encourages us to refrain from four things: false speech, divisive speech, hurtful words and idle talk.

False speech or lying is not allowed in almost all religions. So it requires no detailed explanation. It is simply

2. The Four Marks of Life are traditionally not included here, but I have taken the liberty to do so for they provide an appropriate Right View on life for contemporary people, particularly one that youths can easily understand.

the act of saying something that is different from the facts or opposite of what is in your heart.

Divisive speech includes slandering, backbiting and talk that can lead to hatred and disunity among individuals or groups of people.

Hurtful words include harsh, rude, hateful and abusive language that is hurtful to others.

Idle talk refers to the act of talking about things that have very little value, such as gossip, which is based on hearsay and is often used just to pass the time or to build a false sense of camaraderie in the spirit of self-righteousness.

Buddhism discourages wrong speech because they are often carried out with G.A.S. or greed, anger/hatred, and stupidity/ignorance. However, when we practice Right Speech, it helps to reduce our G.A.S., as well as to speak more pleasantly, thoughtfully and compassionately.

4) RIGHT CONDUCT

Right Conduct encourages us to refrain from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct.

Killing is the act of taking life, which includes human life. In the history of Buddhism, this teaching discouraged lay Buddhists (who are not monks or nuns) to stay away from occupations that involve killing, such as making and selling of arms and weapons.

Buddhists also stayed away from work that involved killing animals, birds, fish and other living creatures. However, that does not mean that all Buddhists are vegetarian, for even the Buddha ate meat when offered. That

is true even today for Theravada monks and lay people in Southeast Asian countries.³ When they do so, they express their deep gratitude for the lives sacrificed and do their best not to waste them.

Stealing is simply the act of taking what does not belong to you. This, too, is one of the widely held prohibitions found in virtually all religions.

Refraining from sexual misconduct for Buddhist monks and nuns meant that they could not take part in any form of sexual activity, since they have taken vows of celibacy. For laypeople, a Buddhist understanding is that sex has the potential to cause great harm and suffering if misused, but, on the other hand, it can be a source of pleasure and fulfillment between two people in a loving and committed relationship.

And it is true that it becomes a little more difficult to define what constitutes “misconduct” for people in different cultures and over time. However, the best way for those of us living today to understand “misconduct” is to understand that it means any action that causes *harm*. So, for someone in a committed relationship (such as marriage), having an affair would cause a lot of pain to that person’s partner. Further, acts of obvious sexual misconduct such as sexual harassment, rape and sex with a minor constitute not only criminal behavior but also cause enormous pain and emotional damage to the victims forever.

3. When Buddhism entered China and the rest of East Asia, especially the monks and nuns adopted vegetarian practices. Today many lay Buddhists are not strict vegetarians.

5) RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

For monks and nuns, Right Livelihood prohibits them from engaging in activities that are unbecoming of spiritual seekers. Lay Buddhists are discouraged from being in occupations that go against the basic Buddhist ethical values.

One such value is refraining from killing, as mentioned before. Such being the case, traditionally there have been occupations that are considered unsuitable. They include occupations that involve trading in arms and lethal weapons, as well as in the killing of animals.⁴ Other unsuitable occupations are those that involve slavery, prostitution, and illegal drugs.

It is clear from this that Buddhism discouraged professions that bring harm to others. This is in line with the Buddhist position of strongly opposing any kind of war and aggressive acts, as seen in Buddha's well-known words, "Hatred is not overcome by hatred, but only by acts of non-hatred is hatred overcome." [*Dhammapada*]

6) RIGHT EFFORT

Right Effort is the focused, energetic will to foster positive and wholesome states of mind. There are four ways of accomplishing this, as explained traditionally: 1) to

4. While Buddhists are discouraged from going into these occupations, we realize that some people may not have that choice. So, we should not be too quick to judge other people's choices and circumstances. Plus, those who are not vegetarians are able to enjoy their meat precisely because there are people working in the slaughterhouses.

prevent negative and unwholesome states of mind from arising, 2) to put an end to negative and unwholesome states of mind that have already arisen, 3) to cultivate conditions for positive and wholesome states of mind that have not yet arisen, and 4) to foster and bring to perfection the positive and wholesome states of mind that have already arisen.

7) RIGHT MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is one form of meditation. In our view, Right Mindfulness is the most useful and accessible practice for the laypeople living in today's society, which is why millions of Americans have either practiced it or are practicing it today. Americans are practicing mindfulness not only in a spiritual context but also to reduce stress, increase focus, enhance physical immunity, etc. And they are being carried out at hospitals, prisons, schools, military facilities and workplaces. Some of the largest companies such as Google, Nike and Apple are offering their employees the opportunity to practice mindfulness at the workplace.

Mindfulness practice calls for four objects of awareness, which are 1) the activities of the body, 2) sensations or feelings, 3) activities of the mind, and 4) "objects" of the mind such as ideas, thoughts, and conceptions.

Of the four, the mindfulness of the first object (the activities of the body) is easiest for beginners to understand and practice. So, here, we will concentrate on this and leave the explanation of the other three (sensations, activities of the mind and the objects of the mind) for another occasion.

Now, this mindfulness of the activities of the body can further be categorized into three types: 1) breathing, 2) bodily movements, and 3) elements that make our body.

Breathing. We will first explain the mindfulness of *breathing*. To start, if we are able to do so, we sit with legs crossed, sitting on the floor with our back straight, at a 90-degree angle or perpendicular to the floor. This posture resembles what you often see in the images of the Buddha sitting in meditation.

However, for those of us who are laypersons living in the contemporary world, I believe we should be allowed to sit in chairs if we so prefer or need to. While practicing this form of mindfulness, our hands are placed naturally and comfortably on our lap.

We can practice mindfulness whenever we have a lit-



tle time, for example, just before a game or a test, before going to bed, or riding in a car as passenger, but . . . *not* while we are *driving*!

As for our eyes, we can keep them half-opened or gently closed. You should choose whichever is more comfortable. If our eyes are open, our gaze can be cast downward a bit, perhaps about 45 degrees. We then breathe naturally through our *nose*, not our mouth. Breathing should also be very natural and not forced.

As for our thoughts, some people incorrectly think, “we should *not* think of anything” or “we need to *empty* our minds.” For beginners, it is impossible to stop our thoughts and feelings from arising. We will not be able to repress them. Instead, we are invited to notice thoughts and feelings and then simply let them go in order go back to awareness of our breathing. In other words, we *pay full attention* to our breathing. This can be done in a number of ways.

One way is to silently say “in” when we breathe in, and “out” when we breathe out. Another method is to direct our attention to the spot under our nostrils to pay attention to the fact that it feels cool when we breathe in, and it is warm when we breathe out. Or we can pay attention to the slight rise and fall of our abdomen; as we breathe in, our abdomen rises, at which time we can say silently to ourselves, “rising”; and as we breathe out, our abdomen falls, at which time we can say “falling.”

Especially in the beginning, our mind will wander; various feelings and thoughts will crop up, making it awfully difficult to concentrate on our breathing. Actual-

ly, we cannot *prevent* thoughts and feelings from arising, because the seeds have been planted as the result of our past actions, and these thoughts and feelings are the inevitable fruit of such seeds. So, our objective is *not* to prevent to them or to try to think of nothing.

What we must do is to allow those feelings and thoughts to arise and then let them go. Let them come and go, but don't cling to them and get entangled with them. As we let our thoughts come and go, we return to paying attention to our breathing, just as a spider eventually returns to the center of its web. Breathing is the center of the web.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a well-known Buddhist monk and teacher, says that many people hate their bodies, but breathing helps them to become more acquainted and familiar with their bodies.

He knows a meditation teacher who begins her practice session by telling her students, "Let us be aware of our bodies. Breathing in, I know I am standing here in my body. Breathing out, I smile to my body." She encourages us to make peace with our body.

You can do this for several minutes or for however long you wish. Many people have found that even a few minutes of mindfulness practice will leave them feeling a little more settled and physically refreshed.

Bodily movement. The second category of mindfulness of the body is on our bodily movement. This calls for us to pay full attention to our bodily activities, such as putting on our clothes, listening to others, and eating our meals. Let's take the example of listening to someone

else talk. As we all know, listening with undivided attention is not an easy task. However, with mindfulness practice, we can be trained to listen more fully and deeply to others when they are talking.

The same goes for eating. Often we are not even aware of what we are eating, for while eating we may be watching television, looking at the smartphone or be too absorbed in a conversation. We are, thus, encouraged to be mindful and aware of the food that is on our plates. If we are not aware of what we are eating, then we certainly cannot be savoring the food; this very frequently leaves us feeling emotionally unsatisfied.

However, this mindfulness helps to ease this unsatisfactory feeling, while leading you to experience greater contentment. This sense of satisfaction or fulfillment cannot be explained logically. We simply need to practice and experience it!

Elements that make our body. Thirdly, with regard to the mindfulness of the elements of our body, the Buddha taught that our body is comprised of the elements of earth, water, fire and wind.

First, we become mindful of the *earth* element in us, which refers to the matters that are solid. So, there are earth elements inside of us as well as outside of us. When we realize that we are comprised of the same elements as things outside of us, then we see that there is no real boundary between the rest of the universe and us.

Next, we pay attention to the *water* element within us, which makes up over 75 percent of our body. When we do, we realize that we are, again, deeply connected to

the water that is outside us, whether it's in the form of rain or water in the rivers and the oceans.

The same is true for the *heat* element that is within us. Heat is found in the various processes of our body that manifest in the warmth of our body. And this is intimately connected to the heat outside of us, which ultimately is based on the sun, which is some 91 million miles or 150 million kilometers away.

Fourth is the *wind* element. This exists as air within us and as wind outside of us, as previously discussed in connection with mindfulness of breathing.

So, in meditating on the four elements, we become more aware of the components that make up our body as well as our body's essential connection to the outside world. This form of meditation helps us to realize that we are, indeed, "*one* with the universe."

8) RIGHT CONCENTRATION

The last or the eighth on the list of parts of the Eightfold Noble Path is Right Concentration; its original Sanskrit is *dhyana*, from which we get the Japanese word "Zen."

Concentration, however, involves a very advanced set of practices mostly for monks and nuns. It aims for higher spiritual states that go far beyond what most ordinary people can attain. So we shall forgo discussing the details of Concentration until there is another opportunity to do so. Instead, you are encouraged to practice Mindfulness as was previously discussed, for you will surely reap much benefit physically, mentally and spiritually.

The Eight Seen as Three Learnings: Tiger Woods as Example

As we conclude this section, I wish to make mention of another well-known teaching called the Three Learnings, which help to simplify the Eightfold Path, thus, making the latter easier to grasp and remember. The Three Learnings are, 1) conduct, 2) meditation, and 3) wisdom.

Each of these is a category containing the appropriate parts of the Eightfold Noble Path:

Wisdom:

Right View

Right Intention

Conduct:

Right Speech

Right Conduct

Right Livelihood

Meditation

Right Effort

Right Mindfulness

Right Concentration.

The Three Learnings make it easy for us to realize that we need to cultivate the three main dimensions of ourselves. They are how we understand our lives and the world (Wisdom), how we act (Conduct), and how we train our mind (Meditation).

Let's take the case of a world-famous athlete, Tiger Woods, who, as mentioned earlier, is a Buddhist. Yes, I

know, his talents and accomplishments are extraordinary, and you may feel that he will not be a good example.

However, even he has to exercise the Three Learnings in order to be at the top of his game. For example, he constantly studies and works on his form, whether it be his drives, approaches or putts. Before any tournament he studies the peculiarities of the course. An understanding is essential, even for someone especially gifted as Tiger Woods. And this represents the *wisdom* dimension of the Three Learnings.

At the same time, I am sure that Tiger Woods requires a lifestyle that includes a healthy diet, ample sleeping time, and a satisfying relationship with other people. His relationships, for example, would suffer if he were to speak harshly to his family and lie to his business associates. He could not afford the disruptions and upheavals in his personal life that would inevitably result from such behavior.

Actually, Tiger Woods did conduct himself very poorly in ways that led to the breakup of his marriage. He then underwent years of difficulties in his personal life and a long slump in his golf game before rebuilding his life to regain his championship status.

For this reason, I considered not citing Tiger here as a model. However, I felt that we humans do make mistakes and that one failure should not be the reason for condemning Tiger forever. This is especially true when efforts are made to sincerely correct one's mistake. And I believe he has done that. Tiger has pulled himself together to conduct himself as in the past, which I believe



People paying respects or meditating in various ways at the annual Change Your Mind Day at Central Park, New York. Photo by Don Farber.

contributed to his amazing comeback victory at the 2019 Masters Tournament.

So, proper conduct is necessary for a person to be physically and emotionally supported by others to do well in one's work, and this applies to everyone, including famous people like Tiger Woods. Here we see the *conduct* dimension.

The ability for golfers to concentrate on their game is very important. We have become accustomed to seeing Tiger Woods gaze intently at the ball and the hole. As he does so, thousands in the gallery look on, with millions more doing the same on television. While millions of eyes

are on him, Tiger's eyes are on the ball and nothing else. And his ability to focus on the game is truly impressive.

In a TV interview that I once saw, Tiger attributed his ability to concentrate partly to the values of his Thai mother, for whom Buddhist meditation was a vital part of her Thai heritage. In any event, the ability to focus and concentrate on one's work is essential for success, whether you are Tiger Woods or any person in any line of work. This corresponds to the *meditation* dimension.

So, we can see the importance of cultivating the Three Learnings expressed through the Eightfold Noble Path. By cultivating ourselves in this way, we can develop the wisdom and the confidence to deal with many of the difficulties we face. We won't end up feeling as insecure and upset as Stephen, whose car was stolen as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter!

Chapter 7

Four Marks of Life

Relationship of the Eightfold Noble Path

We would now like to explore the teaching of the Four Marks of Life. As the name implies, these “marks” or “seals” are the teachings that Buddhists considered best represent their religion when compared to other religions. The Four Marks are a separate set of teachings from the Four Noble Truths, even though parts of them do overlap.

Here in this book, I would like to treat the two sets of teachings as an *integral set*, not only because they overlap in some areas but also because this will help readers to gain a unified understanding of the basic Buddhist teachings.¹

In so doing, I wish to regard the Four Marks of Life as an important segment of the Eightfold Noble Path,

1. Traditionally the Four Noble Truths and the Four Marks were not presented as a unified teaching, but I am bringing them together here to make it easier for readers to understand the basic Buddhist way of thinking and living.

which we just discussed. How then do the Four Marks of Life relate to the Eightfold Noble Path? They fall under Right View.²

Right View	=	Four Marks of Life
Right Intention		
Right Speech		
Right Conduct		
Right Livelihood		
Right Effort		
Right Mindfulness		
Right Concentration		

The aim of Buddhist teaching is to help us awaken to truth, and to do so, we need to *view* our experiences, our life and the world in the *right* or *appropriate* way, thus, Right View. And the Four Marks of Life show us the details of how to do that.

The Four Marks of Life as a Whole

What are the Four Marks of Life? We will provide the traditional statement followed by an everyday expression for easier understanding.

- 1) All Conditioned Phenomena is Suffering.
 (traditional)
 Rephrased, “Life is a bumpy road.” (everyday)

2. Traditionally, the primary object of Right View was the Four Noble Truths.

- 2) All Conditioned Phenomena lack substantial entity.
Rephrased, “Life is interdependent.”
- 3) All Conditioned Phenomena are impermanent.
Rephrased, “Life is impermanent.”
- 4) Nirvana is peaceful and tranquil.
Rephrased, “Life can be great.”

In order for us to be able to remember the Four Marks of Life, we have come up with a catchy and light-hearted set of acronyms. Their everyday expressions are Life is a **B**umpy road, Life is **I**nterdependent, Life is **I**mpermanent and Life can be **G**reat. By taking the first letters of Bumpy, Interdependent, Impermanent and Great, we get “**BIIG**.” So, to remember the four, please “Think **BIIG**!”

Now, the opposite of Thinking **BIIG**, or the instinctual way is to view life as follows: Life should be a **S**mooth Road as opposed to Life is a **B**umpy Road, Life should be **M**ine as opposed to Life is **I**nterdependent, Life should **A**lways be the **S**ame as opposed to Life is **I**mpermanent, and Life is **L**ousy as opposed to Life can be **G**reat.”

And if we take the first letter of Smooth, Mine, Always and Lousy, we get **SMAL**. So, to remember them, “Don’t think **SMAL**!” And, put together, “Think **BIIG** and Don’t think **SMAL**!”³

3. I hesitated to use these sets of acronyms because they have appeared in my previous books, but since they have helped many readers to remember this teaching, I decided to use them here as well.

<i>A Buddhist View</i>	<i>Human Instinctual View</i>
Life is a Bumpy Road	Life should be a Smooth Road
Life is Interdependent	Life should be Mine
Life is Impermanent	Life should Always be the Same
Life can be Great	Life is Lousy
Think BIIG!	Don't think SMAL!

Knowing the Four Marks Can Make You Happier

If you find yourself Thinking SMAL, do try to Think BIIG! Doing so will reduce suffering and make you happier.

It's not *wrong* to Think SMAL at times, for it is our human instinctual way to do so. In this competitive world, especially when you are young, you must Think SMAL at times. For example, to go to college or to pursue a career of your choice you must assume "Life is a Smooth Road" and "Life is Mine." If you don't, it would be hard to make plans and muster up the energy to work toward those goals.

However, life doesn't always go your way, and you might find yourself disappointed and even angry at life and the world. And you may get so disillusioned as to conclude that Life is Lousy and to think that life is not worth living. Such thinking could even lead to the "un-thinkable," suicide.

I debated whether to include this episode of my encounter with a suicide but decided to share it for it makes an important point. And it just may discourage someone and prevent a suicide from taking place. If you feel that

you would rather avoid reading it, please skip the rest of this section.

A few years ago, I was on a commuter train. As the train approached a station, it made a sudden stop, jerking us passengers around. It was not a normal stop. Soon some of the station staff came around to look under the very car that I was riding in. An eerie feeling filled the entire car, for the passengers knew that someone had jumped onto the tracks and that the person's body was underneath us.

We've all heard about these train suicides, but it is totally different when it affects you *personally* like this. Well, after sitting there in a hushed car for about 15 minutes, I happened to look out the window, and they had pulled the body to the side of the tracks and had covered it with a blue tarp. Only a pair of shoes showed from under the edge of the tarp, and they looked like those of a young woman.

My immediate thoughts were, "Why does a young woman with the rest of her life ahead of her have to take her own life? How tragic! How sad!" Then, as a parent of three children myself, I thought of her parents, whose shock and pain must be untold and unfathomable. Then, I thought, maybe she would not have gone as far if she had some sound teachings to help her deal with whatever difficulties she was dealing with.

Buddhism Is a Voluntary Religion

So, it is with this kind of concern that I encourage all young people to have a sound and solid view of life, based on religion, philosophy or literature. Here, I am

proposing Buddhism for you to consider, because it can provide you with that core outlook for dealing with the ups and downs of life.

Buddhism is a *voluntary* religion. You are not obligated to follow it. The Buddha claimed, “ehi passiko,” meaning “come here and see [if you are interested].” You have a choice, and Buddhism does not force or command you to follow the teachings.

For example, when a teaching is presented it tells you there is a cause and effect relationship between your actions and the consequences of your actions. It is up to you to look at the consequence of your actions and to determine which action to take each subsequent moment. The decision is up to you.

This attitude applies to the Four Marks of Life. You are free to Think BIIG or Think SMAL. Whichever you choose, it will have its consequence and will make a difference in your life. Buddhism does not *force* you to choose one over the other, for, again, the decision is up to you.

We all have the capacity to exercise the power to make the right decision to achieve greater happiness for oneself and for others. We owe it to ourselves, to our loved ones, and to our world. If you are happy, you will have a positive impact on your family, friends and even strangers that you meet!

Applying the Teachings to Our Lives through a Wonderful Story

Speaking of applying them to our lives, let’s see how “Thinking BIIG and not thinking SMAL” can assist us

in dealing with the difficulties in our lives. To make a point, we'd like to refer to the four characters from the bestselling book *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Dr. Spencer Johnson.⁴

In a faraway land, there lived two mice named "Sniff" and "Scurry" and two little people named "Hem" and "Haw," who were as small as mice but looked and acted a lot like people today. Each day they ran through a maze looking for cheese to nourish them and make them happy. One day, the four found a huge cheese near Cheese Station C. They were naturally overjoyed! They made themselves at home at Cheese Station C, and their life was going very well as they had plenty to eat every day. However, one day the cheese had disappeared completely!

Well, the two groups responded to the disappearance in stark contrast to each other. The mice Sniff and Scurry responded in keeping with "BIIG," while the little people Hem and Haw in accord with "SMAL."

The mice Sniff and Scurry were not surprised that the cheese had disappeared, for they had noticed that it had been getting smaller every day. If you constantly consume something, eventually it will be gone. Life is Impermanent! The cheese, too, does not last forever. Things change. And that change is often not what you wish or want. Life doesn't always go your way, and Sniff and Scurry fully understood life to be a Bumpy road!

4. Spencer Johnson, *Who Moved My Cheese?* (G. P. Putnam's Sons, Inc., 1998). The book is now over 20 years old, but I have cited it here because I believe that younger readers today will still find it meaningful because the message is true in any age.

Hem and Haw Thinking SMAL

On the other hand, when Hem and Haw found their cheese gone, they were completely unprepared. They screamed and yelled, “What! No cheese? It’s not fair.” For them, it was not the way things are supposed to be. They expected life to always go their way, reflecting the non-Buddhist outlook, “Life ought to be Smooth.”

Further, the two little people were deeply upset because they felt that the cheese was theirs. They felt that they were entitled to the cheese and began to blame others for its disappearance. They yelled, “Who moved our cheese?” Hem, in particular, felt that way and insisted that the cheese was his and yelled, “The cheese was Mine.”

To the contrary, the mice made no such claims. They knew that the cheese, which they had been enjoying, was the result of numerous Interdependent causes and conditions that made it possible for the four of them to enjoy. And its disappearance, too, was due to the same principle of causes and conditions. The appearance and the disappearance of the cheese were due to causes far greater than any one mouse or little person could control. So, the mice knew better than to claim the cheese as their basic right or “Mine”!

When the cheese disappeared, Hem and Haw were caught totally off guard, for they had not been paying attention to the small changes taking place each day. They were too absorbed in their own delight and took for granted that the cheese would *Always* be there. They didn’t want to face the truth that everything changes.

On the other hand, the mice Sniff and Scurry weren’t

surprised, for they were prepared for the change and wasted no time in looking for new cheese. Their actions corresponded with the outlook that “Life is *Impermanent*.”

For Hem and Haw, on the other hand, the disappearance of the cheese brought them misery. They refused to accept the situation, and, instead, clung to the way things were. As they waited for the cheese to return, they became mentally and physically exhausted and felt miserable and desperate. Their situation was simply *Lousy!*

Haw Thinking BIIG

To his credit, Haw began to reconsider their miserable situation and encouraged Hem to go with him to look for new cheese. However, the stubborn Hem refused. So Haw went forth by himself.

As he moved forward in the maze, Haw felt two kinds of anxiety. One was the anxiety of *leaving* their Station C, which had become home. The other was the anxiety of moving out into the *unknown*. We have all experienced this kind of situation, haven't we? For example, perhaps you remember feeling sad leaving elementary or middle school and, at the same time, feeling the anxiety of moving up to middle or high school.

As Haw moved out into the maze in search of the new cheese, his anxiety waned as he felt the excitement of going forward to see new things and the anticipation of new cheese. With his newly found joy and energy, he felt how foolish he was to have insisted on remaining at Station C even after the cheese had disappeared.



Haw realized now that of the two kinds of anxieties (of leaving the familiar and venturing out into the unfamiliar), he would definitely take the *latter*. He scolded himself for not realizing that quicker.

Well, the mice had known that all along and had immediately set out in search of new cheese. It took them some time, but they did come upon a great supply of new cheese. They squealed with delight when they found what they were looking for, and it was the biggest store of cheese they had ever seen! So, for Sniff and Scurry, their situation was, indeed, *Great*.

As for Haw, he finally did arrive at the same cheese to his great delight. Haw saw that his mice friends had been there for some time from their big popped bellies and happy smiles as they welcomed him. Haw regretted that Hem was still back there at Station C feeling miserable and *Lousy*.

The question for all of us is, “Which is the better way to go if we want to be happy and be at peace with ourselves, thinking SMAL like Hem and Haw (before he changed), or thinking BIIG like the mice Sniff and Scurry?” Well, the answer is quite obvious, but the decision is up to you.⁵

5. It is important to keep in mind that we humans tend to THINK SMAL precisely because to THINK SMAL is instinctual in nature, and it fosters self-preservation and self-promotion. However, that choice often leads to unhappiness.

Chapter 8

Popular Passages, Metaphors, and Stories¹

The readers are encouraged to become familiar with these popular sayings from the Buddha and the sages of the Buddhism. These 1) passages, 2) metaphors, and 3) stories are sure to benefit you, especially in times of doubt, anxiety, and disappointment.

Passages

1. SELF-RELIANCE

“Make yourself the lamp.

Make the teachings the lamp.” (Nibbana Sutta)

Author’s Comment: These are some of the final words that the Buddha left for his disciples before he passed on. The Buddha taught each of us to believe in ourselves

1. While the comments are by the author, most of the entries and their translation in this chapter are adopted from *Learning the Wisdom of Enlightenment* (BDK America, 2019), pp.1–47.

(*Make yourself the lamp*) based on the truth (*Make the teachings the lamp*). The Buddha trusted our capacity to understand the truth *directly* and *personally*; he discouraged us not to simply believe in what someone else says is true. His confidence in us to do so was due partly to the jewel within each of us.

2. A GREATER VICTORY

“To conquer oneself is a greater victory than to conquer thousands in a battle.” (Dhammapada)

Comment: We all know people who are always trying to control other people. Such people are not happy people. To become a truly happy person, we must work on ourselves mentally and spiritually. When we succeed, it’s a victory worth far more than the false victory of controlling others. There is no true happiness in controlling others against their will. Instead, knowing oneself and controlling oneself is the key to true happiness.

3. VALUE THIS MOMENT

*“Do not regret what happened in the past.
Do not long for what has yet to come in the future.
By not suffering,
By fully planting oneself in the present
You will be healthy in mind and body.”*

(Majjhima Nikaya)

Comment: It’s true that we are a product of the past and that we must prepare for the future. Many of you are studying or in training in order to realize the dreams you

have for the future. However, at each moment we *live* only in the *here* and *now*! The Buddhist teachings help us to live *fully* in the here and now. We have already seen the modern American version of this passage, which concludes with a clever pun: “Yesterday is history, and tomorrow is a mystery. But this moment is a gift, and that is why we call it the *present*!”

4. THE MISTAKES OF OTHERS

“It is easy to point out the mistakes of others, but hard to admit one’s own mistakes.”

(Dhammapada)

Comment: How true this is! However, it is difficult to put into practice, because we don’t want to “look bad” in front of other people. However, if we want to grow as human beings and improve our relationships with family and friends, we must be willing to admit our mistakes and failings. No one is perfect, and we all make mistakes. To admit one’s own mistake is not a sign of weakness but of *strength*. It’s a sign of one’s character and a prerequisite if you want your inner jewel to shine forth and if you wish to realize Awakening.

5. OVERCOMING HATRED

“Hatred is not overcome by hatred. Only by abandoning hatred, can hatred be overcome. This is an eternal truth.” (Dhammapada)

Comment: This passage changed the course of history at the 1951 Peace Treaty of San Francisco, where 49 nations met to officially conclude the war with Ja-

pan. Many nations wanted to punish Japan and extract enormous compensation from Japan for the damages it had caused during the war. In contrast, Junius Richard Jayewardene, representing Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), cited this passage, “Hatred ceases not by hatred but by love,” which was well received and helped to sway the delegates to minimize the compensation sought from Japan. With minimal economic burden, Japan went on to become a peaceful and thriving nation after World War II, hosting two Olympic games in 1964 and 2020.

In contract, I believe that the feelings of revenge and hate in reaction to the 9/11 terrorist attack became one of the driving forces for the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. This has caused untold suffering for the Iraqi people and contributed to the instability of the region and the rise of the Islamic State. Over 6,000 American soldiers have died, and even today American troops continue to remain in Iraq, amid mounting tensions.

6. A FLOWER WITHOUT FRAGRANCE

“To utter pleasant words without practicing them is like a radiant flower without fragrance.”
(*Dhammapada*)

Comment: This passage is warning us against being “all talk and no action.” You probably know such people. If you do, you probably do not want to be around them. Why? It’s because they are not trustworthy. They probably do not fully believe what they say, because if they did, their actions would match their words. As discussed ear-

lier, the Three Actions of speech, body and mind should be *in sync* with each other. (See p. 107)

7. PRECIOUSNESS

*“Difficult it is to be born a human.
Grateful I am for the life that I now have.
Difficult it is for the Buddha to appear in the world.
Grateful I am for being able to listen to the Bud-
dha’s teachings.” (Dhammapada)*

Comment: How rare it is to be born a human! The metaphor of the Turtle and the Floating Piece of Wood in a Buddhist story conveys this truth. On the surface of an immense ocean floats a piece of wood. In it there is a hole a few inches in diameter. A sea turtle that lives at the bottom of the ocean comes up to the surface once every hundred years. The chance of that turtle coming up to the surface and popping its head right into the hole in the wood that’s floating in an immensely vast ocean is the same as that of being born a human being!

So, let us not waste our human life, and let us realize our dreams for our lives and be of service to others. According to Buddhism, the most important goal in life is to realize Awakening, which is made possible by the Buddha’s teachings. That is why we also celebrate the fact that the Buddha appeared in the world to show us the way!

8. ESSENCE OF THE TEACHINGS

“To avoid all evil, to seek the good, to keep the mind pure: this is the essence of Buddha’s teaching.” (Dhammapada)

Comment: The first part of this passage, “to avoid all evil, to seek the good,” is common to many other religions. However, it’s the *last* phrase, “to keep the mind pure” that Buddhism stresses probably more than many other religions. That is because the first part of the sentence (“to avoid all evil, to seek the good”) is a *means* to realize the pure mind, which is the aim of Buddhism. The aim in Buddhism is not only to be good in a moral and ethical sense but also to make *our mind pure*, which means that our G.A.S. (greed, anger/hatred and stupidity) decreases. When we make our mind pure, we become happier and more at peace within. And that pure mind can be achieved by *seeing life correctly* as expressed through the Four Marks of Existence and realized by cultivating the Eightfold Noble Path.

Metaphors

1. THE TWO-HEADED BIRD

There once lived a bird with two heads. The rear head resented the front head, which was able to eat far more because it was in the front of the body. As the rear head’s irritation turned to strong jealousy and then to hatred of the front head, the rear head wanted to hurt the front head by secretly slipping a poison into the food the front head was eating.²

2. In the traditional way of telling this metaphor, the rear head itself eats the poison, which makes the point harder to understand. So, I have “rearranged” it to make more sense by having the rear head poison the front head.



Well, the front head ate the poison and became really sick. However, the rear head soon also became sick! On account of its jealousy and hatred, the rear head had forgotten that it and the front head shared the same body!

(Samyukta-ratna-pitaka sutra)

Comment: As the second of the Four Marks of Life states, we are interconnected and interdependent. This truth is manifested in the nature of our globalized economy and the solutions to climate change. Like the rear head of the bird, if we *punish* other countries too harshly with high tariffs, then they retaliate by not buying our products. So, we all lose.

On the other hand, the front head should have been more sensitive to how the rear head was feeling. If it were, it would have noticed that the rear head was not

happy because of the fact that it was not getting the same amount of food. The front head could have prevented the rear head's spiteful action.

Also, young readers of this book should be especially concerned about global climate change, because your generation will be the one more impacted. What another country on the other side of the earth fails to do can have devastating consequences for us, and the same is true for what our country fails to do for the rest of the world.

2. THE POISONED ARROW

Suppose a poisoned arrow pierced a man, and his relatives and friends got together to call a surgeon to have the arrow removed and the wound treated. But what if the wounded man objects, saying, "Wait a minute. Before you pull it out, I want to know who shot this arrow. Was it a man or a woman? Was it someone of noble birth or was it a peasant? What was the bow made of? Was it a big bow or a small bow that shot the arrow? Was it made of wood or bamboo? What was the bow-string made of? Was it made of fiber or of gut? Was the arrow made of rattan or of reed? What feathers were used? Before you extract the arrow, I want to know all about these things."

Before all this information can be secured, no doubt, the poison will have had time to circulate through his body and the man may die. The first duty is to remove the arrow, and prevent its poison from spreading. (Majjhima Nikaya)



Comment: The arrow represents suffering. If he wants to live and be happy, the man should pull out the arrow rather than waste time by asking all these intellectual questions. These questions not only do not help his predicament but delay pulling out the arrow, putting his life in grave danger.

Buddhism is a “first-person” religion, which means that I need to acknowledge the fact that “*I am shot*” and then *I* need to concentrate on pulling that arrow out. Some of you may feel that you are not yet shot. If that is the case, more power to you.

However, in the long course of life, you will certainly be pierced by at least one arrow. Before this happens it might help you to understand what Buddhism has to say, for you will be better prepared to pull out the poison arrow of suffering.

And if you feel that you have been shot, like many of

us do, let us then concentrate on pulling that arrow out. This means to learn and practice the teachings earnestly as *your own* urgent, existential problem. You should not be stuck asking useless questions, which are merely intellectual in nature.

3. THREE KINDS OF LETTERS

There are three kinds of people in the world. The first are those who are like letters carved in rock; they easily give way to anger and retain their angry thoughts for a long time. The second are those who are like letters written in sand; they give way to anger also, but their angry thoughts quickly pass away. The third are those who are like letters written on running water; they do not retain their passing thoughts; they let abuse and uncomfortable gossip pass by unnoticed; and their minds are always pure and undisturbed.

(Anguttara Nikaya)

Comment: This metaphor has to do with how we respond to anger. People whose mentality is like the letters carved in *rock* get extremely angry and hold on to their anger for a long time. Often they just can't shake off their anger. Their anger negatively affects the rest of their daily activities so that they are not able to concentrate on their studies or work and cannot sleep well. And the second group is comprised of people who are like the letters drawn in the *sand*. They are like most people, who get upset or angry and feel bad for some period of time.

However, wouldn't we all want to be like those of

the last group? They are like letters written on *running water*. It does not mean that they are indifferent or do not care about others and the world. They remain confident in themselves and caring of others but do not allow abuses, gossip and unpleasant things to affect them negatively.

If they get angry, it is because they want to help *other* people who are suffering from injustices or being treated unfairly. Like Gandhi, Martin Luther King and the Dalai Lama, they feel “justified” anger. However, their minds, at their core, are like the pure, running water.

4. LOTUS FLOWERS EMERGING FROM THE MUD

Just as pure and fragrant lotus flowers grow out of the mud of a swamp rather than out of the clean loam of an upland field, so from the muck of worldly passions springs the pure Enlightenment of Buddhahood. Even the mistaken views of heretics and the delusions of worldly passions may be the seeds for Buddhahood.

Enlightenment is a precious pearl. A person must descend to the bottom of the sea, braving all dangers of jagged coral and vicious sharks. That person must face the perils of worldly passion in order to secure the precious pearl of Enlightenment. One must first be lost among the mountainous crags of egoism and selfishness before there will be an awakening of the desire to find a path that will lead that person to Enlightenment.

(Vimalakirti-nirdesha Sutra)

Comment: When we recall our greatest joys in life, they were often preceded by hardships, disappointments or hard work. So, out of the *mud* grew the *lotus flower*! The mud symbolizes two things, shortcomings and unhappiness. Because of our shortcomings, we try hard not to make the same mistakes and aspire to do better. And because of our unhappiness, we strive to find ways to become happier. And when we achieve our aims, we come to realize the lotus flower of improvement and happiness!

I am sure many of you have experienced a disappointing loss on a sports team, but it was followed by a comeback in the next season to gain a redeeming win. This was made possible on account of the entire team's members rallying together to work hard to correct the shortcomings and to improve the team's performance.

Regarding the second point, that of happiness, it was the heart-breaking separation from my first girlfriend that motivated me to learn from my mistakes. That effort contributed to making my subsequent relationship with my wife of 43 years become the treasure or the lotus flower of my life.

So, in Buddhism shortcomings and improvements as well as unhappiness and happiness are seen as *one*, just as the lotus flower grows out of the mud! This means that we too need to face up to the “negatives” in life, which serves as the catalyst and motivation to realize the “positives” in life.

5. PARABLE OF AN OLD WELL

Here is another allegory. A man who committed a crime is running away. Some guards are

following him, so he tries to hide by descending into a well by means of some vines growing down the sides. As he descends he sees vipers (poisonous snakes) at the bottom of the well, so he decides to cling to the vine for safety. After a while his arms get tired, and he notices two mice, one white and the other black, gnawing at the vine.

If the vine breaks, he will fall to the vipers and perish. Suddenly, on looking upward, he notices just above his face a beehive from which occasionally falls a drop of honey. The man, forgetting all his danger, tastes the honey with delight.

“A man” means one who is born to suffer and die alone. “Guards” and “vipers” refer to the body with all its desires. “Vines” refer to the continuity of human life. “Two mice, one white and the other black” indicate fleeting time, days and nights, and the passing years. “Honey” indicates the physical pleasures that lure suffering beings into distractions as the years pass by.

(Sutra of the Parables)

Comment: At first sight, I am sure that this parable might strike some readers as frightening. But please note that this is how life would be if you are *without* any spiritual or ethical guidance.³ For us, we can avoid being in this frightening predicament if we follow the Buddhist teachings.

Please note that in Buddhism, there is no Satan or

3. I believe that a person can be spiritual and ethical without being religious or belonging to a religious organization.

devil that tempts us, or God who judges our faithfulness to him. The cause of suffering lies in our Karmic action, how we think, speak and act in our daily lives. Of course, as discussed earlier, all of us experience difficulties, but it is the quality of our minds that determines how well we face up to difficulties in a positive way, or how much we suffer. And we have the capacity to determine that by letting our jewel within shine forth; this means to let our minds see truth and to live according to the truth.

Stories

1. LOSING A CHILD AND MUSTARD SEEDS

Once there was a young woman named Kisagotami, the wife of a wealthy man, who lost her mind because of the death of her child. She took the dead child in her arms and went from house to house begging people to heal the child.

Of course, they could do nothing for her, but finally a follower of Buddha advised her to see the Blessed One, who was then staying at Jetavana, and so she carried the dead child to Buddha.

The Blessed One looked at her with sympathy and said: "To heal the child I need some mustard seeds; go and beg for four or five mustard seeds from some home where death has never entered."

Filled with hope, the distraught woman went out to look for a house where death had never entered, but her efforts were in vain. At last, she was obliged to return to Buddha. In his quiet presence,

her mind cleared and she understood the meaning of his words. She took the child's body away and buried it, and then returned to Buddha and became one of his disciples.

(Therigatha Atthakatha or Commentary on the Poems by Nuns)

Commentary. Actually, every house she visited had mustard seeds, used as spices in the kitchen, but no house could satisfy the other condition: “a home where death has never entered.” Initially the grieving mother was confident about finding such a home. However, when she could not find any such a home, she came to realize that she was not *alone* in losing a loved one and that death affects every home. In other words, death is universal.

Most of us know this in our heads but do not really *live* it. Instead, we think that we have all the time in the world. So, we end up wasting time on frivolous activities.

Steve Jobs, who seriously practiced Buddhist meditation as a young adult (See p. 19), encouraged college graduates that the awareness of his eventual death made a huge difference in his life. It helped him to make bold decisions and not to be overly concerned by what other people thought of him or his decisions. Such awareness about death does not make us sad and gloomy but instead helps us become more alert and appreciative of life, encouraging us to live more fully and deeply.

2. A THIRD STORY WITHOUT A FOUNDATION

Once there was a wealthy but foolish man. When he saw a beautiful three-story house owned by an-

other man, he envied it and made up his mind to have one built just like it, thinking he was himself just as wealthy. He called in a carpenter and ordered the carpenter to build it. The carpenter consented and immediately began to construct the foundation, the first story, the second story, and then the third story. The wealthy man noticed this with irritation and said, "I don't want a foundation or a first story or a second story. I just want the beautiful third story. Build it quickly."

A foolish man always thinks only of the results, and is impatient about putting in the effort that is necessary to get good results. No good can be attained without proper effort, just as there can be no third story without the foundation and the first and second stories. (Upama-shakata-sutra)

Comment: The point of the story is quite obvious, so I shall make no further comment except to encourage all of us to build a strong foundation by working on the fundamentals of whatever we aspire to do in life.

3. HARP STRINGS

There was a young man named Srona who was born into a wealthy family but was of delicate health. He was very earnest about gaining Enlightenment and became a disciple of the Blessed One. On the path to Enlightenment, he tried so hard that finally his feet bled.

The Blessed One pitied him and said, "Srona,

my boy, did you ever study the harp at your home? You know that a harp does not make music if the strings are stretched too tightly or too loosely. It makes music only when the strings are stretched just right.

“The training for Enlightenment is just like adjusting the harp strings. You cannot attain Enlightenment if you stretch the strings of your mind too loosely or too tightly. You must be considerate and act wisely.”

Srona found these words very helpful and finally gained what he sought. (Mahavagga)

Comment: This story points out the flaws of going to the *extreme* when trying to achieve one’s aim in life, including that of Awakening or Enlightenment. If you recall, Siddhartha attained Awakening as the result of avoiding the extremes, a life of pleasure on one hand and a life of austere practices on the other. (See p. 42) His austere practices allowed him to have only one drop of water and one grain of rice a day, reducing him to skin and bones and leaving him without any energy to carry out the practices. Srona committed the same mistake by subjecting himself to extreme rigor, ending up being like the harp strings that are too tightly stretched.

4. OFFERING OF GARMENTS

When Syamavati, the queen-consort of King Udayana, offered Ananda 500 garments, Ananda received them with great satisfaction.

The King, hearing of it, suspected Ananda

of dishonesty, so he went to Ananda and asked what he was going to do with these 500 robes.

Ananda replied: "Oh King, many of the monks are in rags, so I am going to distribute the garments among the brothers."

"What will you do with the old garments?"

"We will make bed covers out of them."

"What will you do with the old bed covers when they wear out?"

"We will make pillowcases."

"What will you do with the old pillowcases?"

"We will make floor coverings out of them."

"What will you do with the old floor coverings?"

"We will use them for foot towels."

"What will you do with the old foot towels?"

"We will use them as floor mops."

"What will you do with the old mops?"

"Your Highness, we will tear them into pieces, mix them with mud and use the mud to plaster house walls."

Every article entrusted to us must be used with good care in some useful way, because it is not "ours" but is only entrusted to us temporarily.

(Samyukta-ratna-pitaka-sutra)

Comment: We definitely need more of Ananda's spirit of conservation! I feel that we waste so much in our throw-away culture. We throw away everything from used plastic cups and utensils to all kinds of electronic gadgets. The ocean is now cluttered with millions of tons of debris, especially plastic. All of this waste is happening in the name

of convenience and made possible by cheaply available raw resources including those extracted from the earth, and manufactured by people who are poorly paid. So, we really need to adopt Ananda's way of treating material things with care, reverence and without wasting.

5. GRATITUDE TO A BAMBOO THICKET

In a bamboo thicket at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains, there once lived a parrot together with many other animals and birds. One day a fire started in the thicket from the friction of the bamboo stalks rubbing against each other in a strong wind, and the birds and animals were frightened and confused. The parrot, feeling compassion for their fear and suffering, and wishing to repay the kindness he had received in the bamboo thicket where he was allowed to shelter himself, tried to do all he could to save the other creatures. He dipped himself in a pond nearby and flew over the fire and shook off the drops of water to extinguish the fire. He repeated this diligently with a heart of compassion out of gratitude to the bamboo thicket.

This spirit of kindness and self-sacrifice was noticed by a heavenly god, who came down from the sky and said to the parrot, "You have a gallant mind, but what good do you expect to accomplish with a few drops of water against this great fire?" The parrot answered, "There is nothing that cannot be accomplished by the spirit of gratitude and self-sacrifice. I will try over and

*over again and then over again in my next life.”
The great god was impressed by the parrot’s spirit
and together they extinguished the fire.
(Samyukta-ratna-pitaka-sutra)*

Comment: We cannot help but be moved by the parrot’s determination and effort to put out the fire, even though it seems like a lost cause. We may feel the same way about how much each of us can contribute in tackling huge social problems, such as poverty, mass shootings and climate change. But the parrot teaches us an important lesson. That lesson is that if all of us did our *small* part, then we *collectively* will become a huge force to accomplish what appears to be an impossible task.

Part Three

In Daily Life

Chapter 9

Issues and Problems in Daily Life

Before offering my response to each of the ten issues and problems, I wish to first mention five basic *principles* that apply to all of them.

1. Life is a Bumpy Road. As the Buddha taught, life is truly a bumpy road. It is not a smooth road. Things often don't go our way. That's a fact of life, which means everyone is in the same boat. So if things don't go your way, you are not being punished, and it is not necessarily your fault or due to fate.

2. No divine or supernatural being who punishes and tests. Buddhism does not believe in a divine or supernatural being somewhere "out there," who punishes or tests you. Things happen on account of a whole host of cause and effect relationships, which are mostly beyond your control. For example, you were late to school, but it was because the bus was late, which was beyond your control.

However, whether you suffer or not is up to you. We

cannot always control *our situation*, but we can control *our attitude* or how we think about that situation. This way of thinking is expressed in the concept of the horizontal axis and the vertical axis. (See p. 108)

3. Turning problems to opportunities. We all have the ability to turn problems into opportunities to learn about life, the world, and about ourselves. And this helps to deepen our ethical and spiritual understanding to make us stronger and wiser in dealing with our future problems and challenges.

4. First person. Buddhism is a “first person” religion. This means that we should face up to the problems of life as a *personal* matter first and foremost. And the solutions must come to you in ways that are personal and unique to yourself, which is the only way that you can be truly satisfied and fulfilled. Further, you cannot help others well if you have not helped yourself first. This is like when in an airplane emergency situation, we are instructed to put on one’s own air mask *first* before helping anyone else.

5. Importance of physical well-being. Buddhism, like other religions, emphasizes not only the mind (the mental and the spiritual) but also the *body* as well. Body and mind are not separate. How we feel and think is often influenced by how our body is doing. If you haven’t slept all night, you can’t think straight and will become grouchy and you’re probably a miserable person to be around. This is why Buddhist practice calls for the Three Learnings, which consist of 1) conduct, 2) meditation and 3) wisdom to be practiced as a set. For conduct and meditation, taking good care of our bodies is vital! Many

people have disabilities and chronic illnesses, but a society that cares for all helps everyone to enjoy as much physical well-being as is possible.

The following ten situations represent some of the frequent problems and issues that many young people are wrestling with. If they apply to you, I hope that my response will be of some benefit to you.

1. LOSING A MATCH IN SPORTS (A SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD'S STORY)

Our basketball team lost an important game in overtime by just two points. I'm so upset and disappointed, especially because it was a team that we had beaten last year. Plus, we really practiced hard and felt that we were well prepared for the game. I feel like God was not on our side this time.

I'm sorry to hear about the loss and that you are upset and really disappointed. Although it can be hard to understand, from a Buddhist perspective, there is no such God that can determine the outcomes of basketball games.

As previously discussed, we believe that things happen due to one of the two basic categories of cause and effect, the "objective conditions." (See pp. 106, 108) The objective conditions point to a myriad of circumstances that contributed to the outcome of the game. The outcome is due not to one or two causes that you can isolate. So, you should not blame yourselves, your coach or even the referees.

Next, it will be for your own benefit and well-being to find a way to overcome your disappointment and the frustration of losing. Do remember that Life is a Bumpy Road. It won't always go your way. So, losing is part of life. The famed NBA basketball coach Phil Jackson said that "losing is as integral a part of the dance as winning." So, to lose is not a failure or reason to be embarrassed. Coach Jackson further encouraged us:

"Buddhism teaches us that by accepting death, you discover life. Similarly, only by acknowledging the possibility of defeat can you fully experience the joy of competition."¹

What is important is to bounce back and to be ready for the next game. You should not and cannot be hung up on what happened in the past. You cannot change the past, but you can try to change the future. You can learn from mistakes in past games, so as not to repeat the same mistakes in the future. At the same time, do see what you can do to build on what your team did well the last time. So do turn this loss into a chance to do better the next time.

2. STRICT PARENTS (A FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD'S STORY)

I think that my parents are too strict. It's clear when I see how my friends' parents are. For exam-

1. Phil Jackson, *Sacred Hoops: Spiritual Lessons of a Hardwood Warrior* (Hyperion, 1995), p. 202.

ple, I have a 10 o'clock curfew, can't go on a date till I turn 17, and they force me to take piano lessons even though I don't have much time to practice. Plus, I have to help with the chores around the house, like taking out the garbage, doing yard work, and cleaning the bathroom once a week. None of my friends are doing chores. It's only me.

First of all, a Buddhist approach would be to understand the nature of your problem. When you do so, you might see that this problem is the fifth of the Eight Kinds of Suffering, which is “having to face people and situations we don’t like.”

Secondly, have you ever sat down and talked with your parents about how you feel about the way they are raising you? If you haven’t, you are encouraged to do so, because the Buddhist approach is to “face up” to problems instead of avoiding them.

When we encounter a situation we don’t like, we have three basic options. They are, 1) to leave the situation, 2) to accept the situation as it is, and 3) try to improve the situation by working things out. The first is not a realistic option because you are a minor and still a member of the family. Plus, I doubt that you would want to *leave* the family that you love. If you choose the second option, you should accept how things are and no longer complain about your situation.

The third option is to face up to the problem and to work things out directly with the persons involved. By doing so, it’s possible that you and your parents will have a better understanding of each other. You can ask them

to explain the reasons for their rules, while you explain to them that you feel that they are being much more strict than your friends' parents.

You probably can become more accepting if you hear their reasons. That's because you will come to understand that your parents have your welfare in mind when they set the rules. Hopefully for you, they ease up on the rules a bit in response to your wishes.

But even if they don't, you've *faced up* to your problem and tried to resolve it by trying to understand your parents and to work things out. You could also talk with a trusted friend, teacher or minister who will not only empathize with your predicament but also provide a fresh perspective on the issue.

In the end, I am confident that these honest discussions with your parents and trusted people can only but contribute to changes for the better!

3. BREAKING UP

(A TWENTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD'S STORY)

My boyfriend and I have been seeing each other for one year now, but he suddenly broke up with me without any warning. I am devastated. Even though we had some problems, we were trying to work things out. I wish he could have tried harder to make things better. I hear from my friends that he may have found someone else, which hurts me even more.

Yes, I hear you! When I was your age, I went through something very similar. So, you are not alone. It hurts,

doesn't it? It wouldn't be right if it didn't, for this person means a lot to you. It hurts also because you feel rejected, and your ego has been bruised.

I know it is a cliché, but "time does heal." But in order to heal a bit quicker and to learn from this, let me share some ways of looking at this from a Buddhist perspective. Again, an important Buddhist perspective is to turn this difficulty into a learning experience toward greater understanding about life and for moving toward Awakening.

First of all, this type of suffering is the sixth among the Eight Kinds of Suffering that Buddha talked about, "separating from persons and situations we like." (See p. 91) This can take the form of separation through death but also, as in your case, separation while alive.

Secondly, the truth of impermanence may help you to accept the situation. (See pp. 127–128) It points to the fact that all things, including relationships, will eventually end. If it's any consolation to you, many other relationships that begin during college end within a few years. The chance of such relationships culminating in marriage is even less. So, what happened to you is par for the course. That may not be a consolation, but such is the harsh reality!

Thirdly, the truth of interdependence, (See pp. 127–128) shows us that your relationship with your boyfriend was the result of immeasurable causes and conditions that brought you together. For example, you lived in the same period in history and in the same location, both of which carry their sets of causes and conditions that stretch indefinitely back in time and space. Yes, you did take the initiative

to make the relationship, but your effort was just a tiny drop in an ocean of factors that brought you together.

That means that when the causes and conditions *change* to bring about an end to the relationship, *any* effort by you will not be able to change the situation. So, no matter how hard you wish or try to save the relationship, it will be to no avail, for our relationships are the result of things that are often far beyond your control.

You may be feeling, “There is no one else better for me than he is. He was the *only* one for me. My life would be worthless without him.” Well, it may be hard for you to see it now, but many people in your situation have gone on to find another person, who turned out to be even a better fit for them.

Finally, the fact that things did not work out between you two often means that there were some fundamental mismatches between you. You may not be able see that *now*. In my own case, it was only a number of years later after we broke up that I came to see and admit to basic incompatibility in our personalities. It became evident only in hindsight. So in a way, it may be good that problems surfaced now, rather than later, after the two of you may have gotten married.

4. DEATH OF A FAMILY MEMBER (AN 18-YEAR-OLD’S STORY)

My 75-year-old grandfather passed away suddenly. The cause of death was pneumonia. We were all shocked because he was in pretty good health. He lived nearby so I saw him often. Grandpa was my favorite among all my four grandparents. He

took me fishing and told me many stories about his life and his younger years. I feel angry that he was taken away from us; he should have lived for at least another 10 years.

This must be difficult for you, especially since he was in quite good health and was your favorite grandparent. Plus, these days, 74 is quite a young age to die. So, it's natural for you to feel regret and sadness. If you didn't feel them, it would be unnatural.

The Buddha acknowledged the kind of suffering you are going through, and he stipulated "death" as one of the Eight Kinds of Sufferings. (See p. 91) Also, what you are experiencing can be counted as the sixth suffering, "separating from persons and situations we like." This is the same category as the previous story of a romantic breakup, though in this situation it's your grandparent, and your separation from him is through death.

Amidst your pain of losing your grandfather, there are ways to lessen your sadness and to learn from the loss. First of all, what is important is not always the *length* of life but *how* one lived his or her life. From what you have told me about him, your grandfather lived a fulfilling life, having had meaningful and enjoyable work for over 40 years. He was blessed with a loving family, who took great care of him till the end. And you were an important part of that.

It would serve you well to remember all the good times you had with him, especially those fishing trips. Also, ask yourself what lessons you learned from him. If one of them is the importance of "perseverance," then

when you find yourself persevering toward a goal, think of your grandpa and feel that he is with you in spirit. Then, you will find extra strength to try even harder and longer with his “presence” in your thoughts. So he *continues* to live in you when you put into practice what he shared and taught you.

The passing of your grandfather also awakens you to the truth of impermanence, especially in our relationships with our loved ones. So, you should realize that your parents, brothers, sisters and friends will not be around *forever* and no one knows when they will depart from your life. As the Buddha stated, the one truth about life after being born is that we will die.

You may find this kind of talk to be unnecessarily pessimistic, but it is a fact and a reality. If you recall, Buddhism calls on us to see reality as it *truly is*, not how *we want* to see it. Impermanence is reality. Actually, the reality of impermanence should not make you sad but, to the contrary, encourage you to *cherish* the loved ones in your life here and now and to actively *adjust* to the changes!

5. ENVIOUS OF MY SUCCESSFUL FRIENDS (A 25-YEAR-OLD’S STORY)

I went into a field that doesn’t pay that well. While I enjoy my job and find it meaningful, I can’t help feeling a bit envious of my classmates and friends who are in much better paying jobs. Tom, my best friend from high school, is a software engineer, and he now owns a house, while I struggle just to pay my rent and have no idea when, if ever, I might be able to buy a house.

As the jewels in Indra's Net of Jewels showed, each one of us is unique. There are no two jewels that are exactly alike. So, the uniqueness of each jewel is to be affirmed. In the same way, you should appreciate and affirm what is unique about you. This means that you should not be comparing yourself with others. Of course, that's easier said than done.

One way to help you to not compare yourself with others is to take pride in the choices that *you* made about your profession. You say you find meaning in your line of work and enjoy your job. That is a huge accomplishment. I would like to congratulate you on having found such work, especially a job that serves to benefit those who are less fortunate than others or is nurturing the next generation.

Unfortunately, our society places too much premium on material things, but you should take pride in your work for the good that you do for the community. Please cherish that sense of meaning you have in your work, because from a Buddhist perspective that is far more important than what this excessively materialistic society considers important. Such expectations are superficial, but your pride in your work is deeper and will serve to provide true meaning and fulfillment in the long run.

Besides, at 25 years of age, you are still very young. Compared to me, you are far ahead of the game. Having spent 15 years in graduate school to earn my Ph.D. in Buddhist studies (including two masters), I did not have a full-time job till I was almost 40 years old. And my position as a junior faculty member at a Buddhist seminary and a minister at a temple were hardly good paying jobs!

Nevertheless, we managed to live a modestly comfortable life and to raise three children.

So, with careful allocation of funds and a modest lifestyle, you should be able to have enough material things. After all, if you live a middle class lifestyle in the United States, you are wealthier than the majority of the people in the rest of the world. More importantly, the mental and spiritual well-being of your meaningful work will far outweigh what you may have gotten from a bigger house and a more extravagant material lifestyle.

6. UNEASY ABOUT BEING A BUDDHIST (A 13-YEAR-OLD'S STORY)

I feel uneasy when people ask me about my religion because Buddhism is not that well-known and is a minor religion in this country. Plus, I am a Buddhist mostly because my parents are Buddhist. One of my Christian friends felt sad for me because she says that I will go to hell when I die. I know that that is not true, but it still doesn't make me feel better.

It sounds like your discomfort comes from the fact that you don't know much about Buddhism. But you can turn this into an opportunity to become better informed about your religion by learning more about it. When you do, you will gain greater understanding and confidence so that you would not be bothered by what others say about Buddhism.

You will, for example, learn that, as discussed already, Buddhism is one the three major world religions and is

the oldest among them. This means that like Christianity and Islam, Buddhism has followers in vast areas of the world. And, as we learned, in more recent years it has become more popular in Europe and North America, especially in this country.

There are now many people in this country who are Buddhists or who are Nightstand Buddhists (See p. 11). They include people whose names are well-known, for example, Patrick Duffy, Richard Gere, Phil Jackson, Steve Jobs, Goldie Hawn, Kate Hudson, Oliver Stone, Tina Turner, and Tiger Woods.

Plus, Buddhism has been a relatively peaceful religion. You will not see Buddhists engaged in large scale fighting over differences in the teachings or using force to convert others to Buddhism. Of course, as in any large religious group, there have been so-called Buddhists who have fanned the flames of hatred and violence. I find this deeply regrettable and sad, but such Buddhists are a tiny, tiny minority.

Again, please do learn more about the teachings and practice them in your daily life. *That* will assure greater confidence in Buddhism as *your* religion of personal choice!

7. BULLYING AND PREJUDICE (A 14-YEAR-OLD'S STORY)

I feel bad that some of my classmates pick on some of the kids in our class. I think they do that because the bullied kids are immigrants and don't speak English well. I've also heard these bullying classmates make some nasty racial comments.

You are right to feel bad, for there should be no place in our society for bullying to take place. Unfortunately, however, it does take place even though many people try to prevent this from happening.

Often these bullies are motivated by their desire to hurt others. And they seek to hurt others to look stronger and more superior in the eyes of their peers, whom they want to impress. The bullies are showing hatred, one of the Three Poisons or G.A.S.

Hatred is a sign that they are not truly happy with themselves. Hatred is a sign that they don't have confidence and are unhappy. And some of them don't like themselves. So, in a way, we can feel somewhat sorry for them.

However, that does not mean that we can allow bullying to persist. So, you should do what you can to find ways to stop the bullying, but do not try to resolve this all *by yourself*, for you may become the target of their bullying yourself. Share what you saw and heard with the appropriate teachers or school administrators because it's their job to deal with the bullying.

In the end, in all your efforts to deal with the problem, do keep in mind the well-known spirit of the Buddha in dealing with bullying and other forms of hurtful action. And that spirit is found in the following words, "Hatred is not overcome by hatred; only by abandoning hatred can hatred be overcome." This means that meeting hatred with hatred is not the Buddhist way. So, even though we may not be able to get rid of hatred completely, we should strive to feel compassion for the victims and even for those doing the bullying.

8. UNCERTAIN ABOUT MY FUTURE WORK (A 18-YEAR-OLD'S STORY)

I soon need to decide what kind of work I want to do for my career. Unfortunately, I don't know what I want to do or know what I'm good at. Half of my friends are in the same boat, but the other half seem to have a pretty good idea what they want to do.

As you say, there are many others who are in the same boat, so please know that you are not alone. I, too, was not sure what I wanted to do when I was your age. So, in my freshman year of college, my tentative major was Business Administration, quite far from where I ended up, a Buddhist minister and scholar! A young Buddhist leader echoed this view as follows:

“I would emphasize that nothing is set in stone. Everything is always changing, i.e. impermanence. You will probably always have the opportunity to change what you do. It may be a more difficult path, but it is still an option. I knew many people who thought they knew what they wanted to do, and changed during college to something completely different.”²

What I can say on this issue will not be anything special, but one thing that is clear is that you are still young

2. Jason Yokoyama, an active member of the Young Adult Buddhist Association of Seattle Betsuin Buddhist Temple.

and can afford to change and grow. That is the strength of being young. If you are earnest, diligent and honest with yourself, I am confident that you will find the right work for you.

Whatever you end up doing, it would be great if you can remember the Buddhist spirit of being of *benefit* to others in your work. We need to work to pay our bills, but the work will be more meaningful if you can be of benefit to others. In life, we often gain more when we “give” to others than when we “receive” from others.

This should be the time in your life when you can explore different things. If you plan to go to college, you should utilize the first two years to fully explore various fields. Outside the classroom, you can get involved in various activities or part-time work that draws your interest.

As previously emphasized in our discussion of the quality of uniqueness related to Indra’s Net of Jewels, you must be true to what interests *you* and what is in keeping with *your* abilities. It’s important to hear what others, especially your parents, have to say, since they have more life experience and have your welfare in mind. However, needless to say, in the end it should be your decision.

**9. I’M AFRAID OF DEATH BUT CAN’T TALK
ABOUT IT WITH ANYONE (A 16-YEAR-OLD
MALE’S STORY)**

Ever since I can remember, I have feared death. It’s not only my own death but also those of my parents, my sister and the rest of my family that I worry about. One night a few years ago, I sud-

denly had this enormous anxiety attack because of my worries about death. That night I couldn't sleep at all. And I can't talk about this even with my parents or close friends because I feel I am being overly sensitive and even a bit weird.

I fully understand your experience, because I felt the same way when I was about the same age as you. Actually, there are *many* people—more than you think—who experience anxiety about death. So, you and I are not alone. And you aren't being “weird.”

Actually, the Buddha and many other Buddhist masters throughout the centuries began their spiritual search motivated by a similar kind of experience as yours and mine. (See p. 40) It is because they had such strong fears that they made a commitment to find a solution to their fear and anxiety. In so doing, they came to realize things that made them feel extremely fortunate and happy, which Buddhists call “Awakening.”

So, Buddhism is a religion that addresses the fear of death *head on*. Some people may consider that to be pessimistic and overly concerned with the dark side of life. I, however, don't think so. I feel grateful that there is a religion, one that has lasted for over 2,600 years, which addresses the kind of anxiety and fear that we share.

After all, everyone dies. So it is not anything we can avoid. It's natural. Because we are born, we have to die! (See a humorous take on this, p. 193) Again, I am thankful that there is a religion like Buddhism that addresses this issue honestly and openly.

So, do check out Buddhism and practice it sincere-

ly and consistently. I believe that such effort will clearly lead to some form of positive resolution and help you to reduce your fears and anxieties about death. The proof can be seen in the millions of Buddhists past and present who have done so!

10. INFERIORITY COMPLEX (A 17-YEAR-OLD FEMALE'S STORY)

I can't talk about this even to my closest friends because, well, I feel so uneasy about it. I look at my classmates and many of them are, frankly, much prettier and smarter than me. My friend Kaci is really pretty and always has boys who are interested in her. And my other friend Jocelyn gets the best grades in class, and she doesn't even study much for the tests. I know that I shouldn't compare myself with others, but sometimes I can't help it.

Again, you are not alone in comparing yourself with others. A recent survey showed that over 80% of 15-year-olds experience feelings of inferiority. That is how virtually all of us are wired because our society fosters that tendency. So, you are not alone in comparing yourself with others and feeling inferior or lacking in worth.

On the other hand, you should know that you will inevitably and always feel inferior when you base your self-worth and self-identity on *comparing* yourself with others. This is because there will always be people whom you feel are superior to you in terms of abilities and appearance.

Further, most people have some level of inferiority

complex. This is true even with those you envy, including Kaci and Jocelyn. I am sure that they, too, compare themselves with others. You might be surprised to find out that they, too, feel a similar sense of inferiority as you do. But you should not find comfort in knowing that, for you need to go *beyond* this and develop confidence in yourself as you are.

What should you do? The answer is the same as in other situations, which is to find the jewel within *you*. The answer is to establish your identity not based on comparing yourself with others. Instead, you will need to come to realize the unique jewel that you have within you and allow that jewel to shine forth in the way that makes you feel most comfortable. Only you can determine what that looks like, because it will be determined by what you like and what you are good at.

In my case, I was fortunate to find my jewel within, a profession and way of life with which I felt comfortable. However, it took quite some time to come to that realization and to overcome a heavy burden of inferiority.

Let me explain in detail. I was born in Japan, but when I was 10 years old my American-born mother decided to return to the United States, and my Japan-born father was in favor of this move. So, my entire family moved to what is now Silicon Valley in Northern California. My brothers and I spoke no English and our life in our new home turned out to be more difficult than the one we had known in our upper middle class lifestyle in Japan.

So, I felt inferior since I could not speak English at all. Plus, I was an ethnic (Asian) and a religious

(Buddhist) minority in a strange land. Fortunately, my classmates and teachers were good to me, so that was a saving grace. But I was teased as being an “FOB” (fresh off the boat immigrant) by a fellow Japanese American. So, I felt inferior to even my fellow Japanese Americans who were born in America and whose families were well established in America. And they, of course, spoke English perfectly.

However, my sense of inferiority began to weaken greatly when I began to learn more about my religion and my culture. At the Buddhist temple, I became a Sunday school teacher assistant when I was in high school and began to gain more pride in being a Buddhist as I learned more about the history and teachings of Buddhism. In college, I majored in Cultural Anthropology and focused on Japanese culture, which increased my appreciation of my cultural roots. So, the knowledge I gained gave me confidence in my religion and culture, which were reasons for being proud of who I am.

Furthermore, the fact that I spoke Japanese till age 10 provided me with an advantage over others who wanted to study the language. I, then, developed proficiency in Japanese language to a point whereby I eventually was able to carry out the necessary studies to qualify as a priest and a scholar of Buddhism. So, this is the case of my being able to turn what once seemed to be a disadvantage into an advantage.

I realize that your situation is different from mine, but the solution is generally the same for everyone. As I mentioned in the beginning, we all need to keep in mind the dangers of comparing ourselves with others.

Instead, you are encouraged to develop the strengths and qualities that are part of you, and to aim for something you like and are good at. This may require you to take what you thought was a weakness and turn it into your strength.

You can surely do it. Out of the mud grows a lotus flower! (See p. 146)

Chapter 10

Questions Often Asked about Buddhism

These answers are meant to help you to respond to questions from others in a concise and direct manner. Where there is more information available in this book, page or chapter numbers are provided.

Buddhism as a Religion

What is Buddhism? Buddhism is a world religion, the followers of which aspire to be like the Buddha, who some 2,600 years ago awakened to truth to overcome suffering for everyone. (See p. 44)

Is Buddhism a religion or philosophy? In the beginning at the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, he taught his disciples the way to cultivate themselves to attain Awakening. So Buddhism could not fit within the usual definition of “religion” or “philosophy.”

So, Buddhism is not a religion? Some people say it is *not* a religion because it does not speak of a God, who is all-knowing, all-powerful and the creator of everything. On the other hand, it *is* a religion because it includes faith, rituals and practices and is of “ultimate importance” to many of its followers.

If so, is Buddhism not a philosophy then? It does include teachings that are philosophical, intellectual or rational in nature like the Four Noble Truths. However, because Buddhism also includes faith, ethics and meditation, it is more than just philosophy.

Why is Buddhism a “world religion”? Though it is concentrated in Asia, Buddhists are now found in many parts of the world, including North America, Europe and Oceania. (See Chapters 1, 4)

What are the other major world religions? They are Christianity with 2.3 billion followers and Islam with 1.8 billion followers. Buddhists number 500 million followers.

Which of the three is the oldest? Buddhism is the oldest, having begun around 500 B.C.E., while Christianity started around the beginning of the Common Era and Islam around 650 C.E.

Why isn’t Hinduism considered a “world” religion? It has more followers (1.1 billion) than Buddhism (500 million) but is confined mostly to one country or cultural sphere, the Indian subcontinent.

Buddhas and Awakened People

Can humans become Buddha? Buddha means “an awakened person.” Shakyamuni Buddha was a human being born in Nepal-India and became a “Buddha” when he attained Awakening at age thirty-five. (See p. 44)

What does “Buddha” mean? In Sanskrit, it means “an awakened person,” who has become freed from suffering. The aim of many Buddhists is to become Buddhas themselves.

Who are Bodhisattvas? They refer to 1) those who are serious seekers of Awakening, or 2) persons who have attained high levels of Awakening and dedicate themselves to leading others to Awakening.

What do you become awakened to? One example is the Four Marks of Life, which are, Life 1) “is a bumpy road,” 2) “is interdependent,” 3) “is impermanent,” and 4) “can be great.” (See Ch. 7)

What happens when you become more awakened? You become more joyful, generous, compassionate, curious, energetic and at peace with oneself, and less swayed by your own greed, anger/hatred and stupidity or G.A.S.

What are the qualities that awakened persons come to possess? They feel a profound love and compassion

for living beings, treat all people equally, and feel a deep bond with all living beings and with nature.

Teachings

Do you have a holy book like the Bible or Koran?

Yes, it is called “sutras,” which contain mostly the teachings spoken by the Buddha. The sutras, however, do not fit into one book, for they amount to many books.

What is Karma? It doesn’t mean fate or punishment but instead points to *our actions*: what we think, what we say and what we do. Karma nurtures our mind so that we can experience a deeper sense of happiness, satisfaction and gratitude than most people. (See p. 105)

So, Karma doesn’t mean fate or punishment? No, it does not. So, many Americans are using it incorrectly. Plus, Karma should not *always* be thought of as bad or negative, because if we act in accord with Buddhism that becomes a good and positive Karma.

So, Karma determines the quality of our mind and feelings? Yes, the more we think, speak and act in keeping with the Buddhist teachings, we become not only happier but also more self-assured and confident.

Can Karma make you become more popular and successful in life? Karma (as how we think and act) cannot *guarantee* this but can certainly increase the chance of your becoming more popular and successful because

people will find you trustworthy and want to associate with you.

Did the Buddha believe in reincarnation? He accepted it as an established worldview of his time but did not consider it as *mandatory* for the purpose of realizing Awakening.

Do you pray? Yes, we pray in the sense of wishing peace and happiness for others and ourselves, but not for worldly benefits such as material things.

But some Buddhists do pray for worldly benefits, don't they? That is true, but they are not being true to the original teachings of the Buddha.

Schools, Denominations and Traditions

How many kinds of Buddhism are there? Two. They are Theravada (school of the elders) and Mahayana (larger vehicle). Theravada is found mostly in South-east Asia and Mahayana in East Asia. Some consider Vajrayana (diamond or thunderbolt vehicle) as the third kind, but most scholars include it under Mahayana. (See p. 56)

Which city in the world has the largest number of Buddhist schools? It is the Los Angeles metropolitan area, with about 100 different kinds of Buddhist schools, followed closely by these American metropolises: Honolulu, the San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle, Chicago and New York.

What is common to all schools? People in all the schools of Buddhism take refuge in the Three Jewels or Treasures, which are Buddha (awakened person), Dharma (teachings) and Sangha (community of teachers and fellow Buddhists).

Other Religions

What about the salvation of people of other religions? We would never say that they would *not* be saved because we believe that all *true* religions can lead their followers to their destination.

Do Buddhists believe in God? “Yes,” if “God” refers to truth and compassion (or love), but “no” if God is a creator of the universe and the judge of our actions.

You don’t call it “God,” do you? No, we call it “Dharma,” which means “teachings” but also the “ultimate reality or truth” at the foundation of the teachings.

What is the main difference between Buddhism and Judaism, Christianity, and Islam? Buddhists do not believe in a God who created man and the universe. So, we can more easily accept the scientific explanation of how the universe began and functions.

Do Buddhists celebrate Christmas? Most American Buddhists celebrate it as a national holiday that promotes the spirit of sharing and goodwill, which Buddhists also value highly.

Wouldn't that be unfaithful to the Buddhist religion? We don't feel that, for we believe it is important to see beyond *form* to appreciate the *spirit*, which we also share.

Misconceptions about Buddhism

Isn't Buddhism pessimistic? No, it isn't pessimistic. Although the Buddhist teachings address our "suffering," they lead us to Awakening in which one becomes calm, joyful, thoughtful and optimistic.

I've heard that awakened people come to have no feelings and take no interest in life. Is this true? That is not correct, since the Buddha acutely felt the suffering of others and spent 45 years sharing his wisdom so that others could be truly happy in the same way that he became happy. (See p. 47)

So, Buddhists are not detached or indifferent toward the world? That's right, because one of the main reasons for the success of the early Buddhist religion was its desire and ability to respond to the needs of the community.

But Pope John Paul II said, "The 'enlightenment' experienced by Buddha comes down to the conviction that the world is bad, that it is the source of evil and suffering for man."¹ We believe that Pope

1. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. (Alfred A. Knopf, 1994, p. 85.

John Paul II has not understood correctly because the source of suffering is not the *world*. Correctly understood, the source of suffering is our personal attachments or G.A.S., which are greed, anger/hatred and ignorance.

So, Buddhism doesn't believe that the world is bad? No, the world is neither all positive nor all negative, for it is what it is! So, whether the world is good or bad depends on how *we* see it and how *we* interact with it. "With my mind, I *make* the world" is what the Buddha said, as is recorded in the famous *Dhammapada* passage.

It seems that Buddhism only cares about the mind. It's true that Buddhism is subjective or psychological in nature, but the goal is to transform the mind toward the goal of a happier, wiser and more compassionate self, which then can contribute to a more peaceful and happy world.

Why Buddhism?

What points about Buddhism do you like? There are several points. Buddhism does not believe that it's the *only* way and accepts other long-surviving religions as valid paths to peace and happiness.

What is another point you like about Buddhism? I like that we can fully accept the scientific view about how the world began and to maintain the spirit of curiosity and inquiry about the natural world.

Any others? Yes. Buddha said, “All sentient beings possess Buddha nature.” This means that not only humans but animals, birds, fish, and other creatures are all sacred.

But we eat other living beings, don’t we? Yes, we, too, need to live, but we partake of them with deep gratitude for their sacrifice; one of the ways to show our gratitude is by not leaving any leftovers.

What is another point you like about Buddhism? I like that it’s not a “sin” if people don’t take interest in the Buddhist teaching. If people are not interested, we simply wait for them to become interested.

You don’t do anything but just wait? No, we do make every effort to make the teachings available to others in the belief that they will take interest when conditions become ripe within their lives.

Are there any other reasons for being attracted to Buddhism? I like the emphasis on *personal* understanding. This means that we do not accept the Dharma unquestioningly, but only if it makes sense personally in our daily lives.

So, did the Buddha really encourage that? Yes, he taught, “Do not accept a statement because it’s found in our books, nor because it’s supposed to be ‘acceptable,’ nor because your teacher said so.” He recommended that people take the teachings and consider them and put their insights and learning to the test in their own lives.

It sounds like “anything goes” and Buddhists can do anything they wish. No, we don’t do whatever we please, for the standard is the Dharma (teachings), and ethics are a very strong part of the Buddhist teachings and practices. However, these ethical recommendations are guidelines, not divine commandments. The Buddha wanted us to test the Dharma in our lives before accepting it.

Any other reasons for liking Buddhism? I am also impressed by how relatively peaceful Buddhism has been throughout its history. “Religious wars” among its denominations have been few and far between.

Chapter 11

Buddhist Humor as a Way to Learn and Share Buddhism

We have stressed the importance of humor in this book as seen in the way it has been incorporated into the explanation of the teachings. This chapter includes *new* ones as well as all of the humorous and light-hearted entries that have appeared previously in this book. I have done so even though some readers may think it redundant, for I wanted all humors to be collected in one section with fuller comments *not* found earlier.

The entries are divided into five categories: Teachings; The Character of Buddhism; Puns and Play on Words; Awakened People; and Misunderstandings and Slip-ups.

Teachings

BUDDHA AND VACUUM CLEANER

A: Why couldn't the Buddha vacuum clean under the sofa?

B: I don't know. Why?

A: Well, it's because he had no *attachments*!

(See p. 27 for its cartoon)

Comment: “Attachments,” such as clinging to the idea that our team has to always win, are a cause of our suffering. As an awakened or enlightened person who no longer suffers, Buddha doesn't have any attachments because he has overcome or gotten rid of them. Of course, “attachments” has another meaning when it comes to vacuum cleaners! (See pp. 88, 92, 93 for more on attachment)

EMAIL ATTACHMENT (1)

DISCIPLE: Master, may I be permitted to send emails?

BUDDHIST TEACHER: Yes, only if you do not have
attachments!

Comment: As in the above, the aim of Buddhists is to overcome or reduce attachments. Unfortunately, as in the above, the Master has the wrong understanding of “attachment” as it applies to email.

EMAIL ATTACHMENT (2)

EMAIL FRIEND: You said there would be an attachment to the last mail you sent me, but I don't see it.

ME: Oh, sorry about that. I was just trying to be a *good* Buddhist. No attachments!

Comment: I will actually use this as an *excuse* whenever I forget to send an attachment as promised. However, I know that I shouldn't use my religion to *justify* my failure!

MONK AND A HOT DOG

A Buddhist monk wanted a hot dog, so he went to a hot dog food stall.

VENDOR: "What would you like, sir?"

MONK: "Make me *one* with *everything*!"

After getting the hot dog and giving the vendor a \$20 bill, the monk did not get his change after waiting for over a minute. Finally, the monk asked, a bit flustered . . .

MONK: Where, where . . . is my change?

VENDOR (pointing his finger at the monk): Sir, the *change* must come from *within you*!

Comment: In my opinion, this is one of the best American Buddhist jokes. I refer you to my earlier explanation and the wonderful cartoon). (See p. 97)

BUDDHIST R & B MUSICIANS

A: Why are there no Buddhist Rhythm & Blues musicians?

B: I don't know.

A: That's because the Buddhists got no *soul*!

Comment: This also involves an insight into the nature of our reality, which the Buddha expressed as “Life is interdependent” or “nothing exists on its own.” (See p. 127) So for Buddhists, a person does not exist completely on his or her own or a person has no essence that is completely independent and permanent. However, some Americans have misunderstood this to mean that Buddhists do not believe in a “soul.”

In this joke, however, “soul” is used in a different way: the musician’s *spirit* and *sense of style* needed to play Rhythm & Blues music. So, the humor comes from the two different meanings of the word “soul”: 1) permanent essence of a person; and 2) musical sense of style and spirit. This joke insinuates that Buddhists don’t have a soul in the *second* meaning, when the fact of the matter is that Buddhists don’t have a soul in the *first* meaning.

Finally, as we see in this book, Awakened Buddhists also have “soul” in the second meaning: a caring, lively spirit for life itself, so definitely for music as well!

BUDDHIST MEDICAL EXAMINER GETS FIRED

There was a medical examiner, who happened to be a very devout Buddhist. He tried to live his religion faithfully in his life. One day he was fired from his job as the county medical examiner.

The reason he lost his job was that he wrote down the same reason as the cause of death on every one of the death certificates he issued. Rather than the usual common causes of death, such as heart failure and stroke, he wrote down the same reason: *birth!*

Comment: In other words, this doctor's thinking is that "we die because we are *born*." If we hadn't been born, we would not have to die. Unfortunately, he took his religion too seriously and zealously applied it to his work as a medical examiner. As a doctor, he should have found the specific medical cause of death instead of inappropriately applying his religious belief.

This joke can be better appreciated if we understand the doctor's outlook, which is based on the Buddhist teaching of *transmigration* or the "cycle of birth and death" (in Hinduism, "reincarnation"). The aim of Buddhism is to be liberated from transmigration or the cycle of birth and death by becoming Awakened, which means the person will no longer have to be born and go through this unending cycle. In other words, "no birth" results in "no death."

It should be pointed out that a belief in transmigration existed before Buddhism and was adopted by Buddhists as a common worldview when Buddhism got started. In my view, it does not constitute the *central* teaching of Buddhism, so a belief in the literal meaning of "reincarnation" is not required to be a Buddhist. In fact, many Buddhists today do not take it literally but instead understand it more symbolically.

CLIFF HANGER

A man is on the edge of a cliff hanging on for dear life. The Buddha appears, and the man looks up and says with his last ounce of energy, "Oh Buddha . . . save me . . . please save me!"

The Buddha replies, "I will. . . . Let go!"



Comment: The man thought he was on a cliff, and that the ground was a *hundred* yards below. However, he was actually only *one* yard above the ground!

This is a metaphor for how we mistakenly think that when things don't go our way or when we feel that we are in trouble, "It's the end of the world!" But from the Buddha's point of view, we are often greatly exaggerating our difficulties. We are "making a mountain out of a molehill"! The Buddha wanted the man to realize that he was fine, because the ground was only three feet below him.

For example, say your team has lost a very important game by a narrow margin. It's devastating for you and your teammates and you may feel as if you fell a hundred yards. You had all practiced so hard and came so close to winning. But in the big scheme of things, losing a big game in this way happens to all teams, sooner or later. So the Buddha is admonishing you, "It's no big deal. Let go!"

RIVER CROSSING

A Zen Buddhist master and his student come to a river, and there they find a young lady who wants to get across the river. But the current might be too strong for her to wade across it, so she is debating whether or not to try to cross on her own; she doesn't know quite what to do.

Seeing her hesitation and judging that it would be dangerous for this young woman to cross the river by herself, the Zen master offers to help. After she accepts his offer, the master carries her in his arms and manages to wade across the river. Once they reach the other bank, he puts her down. The young lady thanks the master, and they go their separate ways.

The master and the student head toward their destination, but the student monk is extremely bothered that his teacher has broken the rule of conduct that advises monks not to touch women. However, he can't quite muster up enough courage to confront his teacher. Finally, after they had walked several miles, the student, visibly upset and no longer able to hold back his feelings, finally blurts out, "Teacher, wasn't that a violation of the monastic regulation forbidding you from coming in physical contact with a woman? You even *held* her to carry her across the river!"

The master then calmly replies, "Well, I put her down way back there. It seems you are the one who is still *holding on* to her. Why haven't *you* put her down yet?"

Comment: The disciple is hung up on the rules, which are important during training, but are not meant to do

away with common sense, compassion, and helpfulness. Rather, the teacher is motivated by a higher standard of thought and action, and motivated by compassion to assist those who are in need, like the young lady.

APPEARANCE OF THINGS

“Things are not what they seem, . . . nor are they otherwise!” (*Lankavatara Sutra*)

Comment: This may be a little hard to appreciate, because this line is meant to discourage us from having *set* or *fixed* views and opinions about things.

For example, we all harbor opinions about our friends as being this or that, but that may not be the complete picture, for we don’t know *everything* about each of our friends. Our opinion is based on a limited perspective, for we know him or her as a friend but not as a son or daughter or brother or sister.

Further, our opinion about a person often depends on how we are feeling. If we are tired and grumpy, we tend to have a negative opinion of the people we meet. So, it would be good to remind ourselves, “They are not [ultimately or always] what they seem [to me].”

Then, what does the *latter* phrase (in the sutra passage) “nor are they otherwise” mean? For example, we thought [say, a person by the name of] Tom is short-tempered, but the *first* part of the passage cautioned us against thinking that Tom is always and by nature short-tempered. So, we come to think that he is *not* short-tempered.

But since the second half of the sutra passage says “nor are they otherwise,” we should also *not* cling to

the opinion that “he is *not* short-tempered” either. This means we should not cling to either one view or the other.

You may be quite confused by now. Well, what is important to get from this sutra passage is that all views and opinions are limited. They are relative and are not absolute. So, we should not get too “hung up” or insist on them as *absolutely* or *always* correct. Buddhism encourages us to be flexible, pliable and open to other possible views and opinions.

Finally, if all views are relative and conditioned, does this mean we *shouldn't* have values or opinions? No, that is not what is being said. To the contrary, values and opinions are important in living our daily lives. However, the sutra passage is simply saying that we should be *flexible* in our views and be *open* to other possibilities because our own understanding is most likely not always complete or comprehensive.

The Character of Buddhism

HERE AND NOW!

A Christian guy is carrying a placard on a busy city sidewalk that reads:

“Jesus is coming!”

Then behind him there is a Buddhist, smiling and carrying a placard of his own that reads:

“Buddha, here NOW!”

Comment: According to the Christian doctrine of the “second coming of Jesus,” Jesus will return to this world in the *future*. Here, the Buddhist is making a contrast by emphasizing one of its main teachings, to live in the *here* and *now*. I like the fact that the Buddhist is smiling and playful. (See p. x for cartoon)

EMPEROR AND A BUDDHIST MASTER

The emperor asked Master Guandao, “What happens to a man of Awakening after death?”

“Why would I know?” replied Guandao.

“Because you are a master,” answered the emperor.

“Yes I am, your majesty,” said Guandao, “but not a *dead* one!”

Comment: Master Guandao’s response is meant to show that Buddhism is mostly concerned with becoming Awakened in *this* very life. After becoming Awakened, one no longer worries or is concerned about what happens after death because he is very much at peace with himself in the here and now.

BUDDHIST BLESSINGS

STEPHEN: Can you bless my new car?

BUDDHIST PRIEST: What benefits do you hope to get from a blessing?

STEPHEN: I don't want anything bad to happen to my brand-new car.

BUDDHIST PRIEST: We don't usually do blessings, since they might be understood as a form of magic, and this goes against our teachings. But if you really insist, I shall do it as a *pastoral* service to give you some peace of mind.

(A few weeks later, Stephen returns, very upset, to tell the priest that the car was stolen, insinuating that the blessing had failed.)

BUDDHIST PRIEST: I'm very sorry to hear this, but the blessing I gave doesn't work for *stolen* cars; it works only to prevent the car from getting into an accident!

Comment: The priest felt obliged out of compassion to help Stephen enjoy peace of mind about his car, at least for a while. Stephen, like many people, saw religion only as a means for worldly benefits.

Buddhism in its original form did not believe in these types of spells and blessings. However, Buddhism became a religion for the large population, it responded to their worldly needs.

At its core, Buddhism helps us to cultivate our mind in order to be able to respond positively and without much suffering when things do not go our way. I hope that through this experience Stephen will become interested in pursuing the *true purpose* of Buddhism. (See p. 104 for further discussion based on this.)

PSYCHIC POWER

Someone had spent a long time meditating in order to have the psychic power of walking on water.

The Buddha said to him: “Why don’t you just cross the river on the ferry?”

Comment: This shows that the aim of Buddhism is not to develop psychic power but to train us to develop greater wisdom and compassion to reduce suffering and increase happiness for oneself and for others. Buddhism is primarily not concerned with extraordinary powers or miracles.

HAPPY MEAL

A: Why do some Buddhists like to buy the Happy Meal whenever they go to McDonald’s?

B: I don’t have a clue.

A: Because the First Noble Truth points out, “We all experience unhappiness.”

Comment: I must admit this joke isn’t the best, but it does help to make an important point. In any religion, there are members who don’t fully understand the teachings of their own religion. These Buddhists are a good example. Only by *changing* our views about life can we overcome unhappiness.

Buying things will never help us to become *truly* happy, of course! A “Happy Meal,” as I am using in the joke, is a symbol of materialism, which includes the belief that owning things will bring us happiness. Buddhists

understand that we need a certain amount of material comfort but believe that *true* happiness comes from how you *experience* life, not what material things you *acquire* in life.

LAND OF SMILES

A: You probably have heard that Thailand, a strong Buddhist country, is known as the “land of smiles,” right?

B: Yeah, I have.

A: Did you know that Thai Buddhists don’t ride on motorcycles in Thailand?

B: Why is that?

A: It’s because when these happy smiling Buddhists ride their motorcycles, bugs can fly into their mouths and *get stuck* between their teeth!

Comment: I first heard this from a group of lay Catholics at an interreligious gathering in Rome. So I adapted this to the Thai Buddhists whom I met back in 1970, when I became a novice monk at a monastery there. The Thai people did seem to be generally very happy. I attributed that to their Buddhist faith. But as with my Catholic friends, I believe that any true religion can help people to lead a happier life.

Puns and Play on Words

G.A.S. FOR THE THREE POISONS

G.A.S. stands for Greed, Anger/hatred and Stupidity.

Comment: This usage of catchy acronyms may not be humorous in the traditional sense, but I think it is a fun and light-hearted way of learning and remembering the teachings. G.A.S. represents the causes of suffering. So, I often say in my classes, the aim of Buddhism is to *release gas*, but please just don't do it here and now!

I actually prefer "Aversion" over "Anger/hatred," because the meaning of the word "Aversion" can include both Anger and Hatred.

D.A.I. FOR THE THREE POISONS

D.A.I. stands for Desire, Aversion and Ignorance

Comment: This is another acronym for the Three Poisons, which is pronounced "die." It's saying that if we become overwhelmed by D.A.I., we will die *spiritually* and *mentally*.

REMEMBERING THE FOUR MARKS OF EXISTENCE AND THEIR OPPOSITES

"Think BIIG and don't think SMAL!"

Comment: This has helped many to remember this important Buddhist teaching, making use of a popular American phrase, "Think Big!" (See p. 128 for detailed explanation)

REMEMBERING THE EIGHTFOLD NOBLE PATH

To remember this teaching, think of a Mr. V. I. SCLEMM.

Comment: I heard this many years ago from a senior priest, who in his sermon provided this as a way to

remember all eight aspects of the Eightfold Noble Path. He said to think of a German name, Mr. V. I. SCLEMM (pronounced “Shlem”); for example, “V” stands for “View” and “I” stands for “Intention” and so on! I initially thought it was funny but a bit silly, but in the many years since then it has helped *me* to remember the eight. The senior priest has passed on, but whenever I talk about the Eightfold Noble Path, Mr. V. I. SCLEMM pops up in my mind with a warm feeling for this teaching and for the senior priest who shared it with us. (See p. 99)

SHOES

Drs. Sunnan Kubose, Alfred Bloom and Kenneth Tanaka were serving as panelists at a summer study session held at the Buddhist Study Center in Honolulu. Dr. Kubose spoke passionately about doing Gassho, which means to put our palms together as an expression of gratitude.

He then spoke specifically about doing Gassho to our “shoes” because they are taken for granted and are always being stepped on and not appreciated. Then, these impromptu comments followed:

BLOOM: Dr. Kubose, your spirit goes to the *soul* of our tradition!

TANAKA: Yes, it’s a *shoe in* for the best humor of the summer session!

A VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE: Yes, we should always put our *best foot* forward!

Comment: Please don't *cringe*, for it really went over well *then*! Humor is best when we actually experience it. Nevertheless, these puns aren't *that* bad, are they?

ROOT CANAL TREATMENT¹

A: Why did a Buddhist refuse Novocain during a root canal?

B: I don't know. Why?

A: He wanted to *transcend dental medication*.

Comment: The line "transcend dental medication" is a play on word for "transcendental meditation," which is actually a non-Buddhist form of meditation commonly known as "TM," which stands for Transcendental Meditation.

Awakened People or Those Approaching Awakening

THE DALAI LAMA'S BIRTHDAY PRESENT²

It's the Dalai Lama's birthday. He is surrounded by a group of his top disciples who stand near him, looking pleased with the present they have just handed him. The Dalai Lama is very happy as he looks down into the bag holding his present.

However, apparently there is *no present* in the bag,

1. From Mr. Deuce Nakano, via email on November 14, 2015.

2. I wish to acknowledge that this joke is based on a greeting card of the same theme, but our wording is a bit different and the cartoon is original.



and the Dalai Lama exclaims, “Wow, this is just what I always wanted...emptiness!”

Comment: “Emptiness” refers to the truth that everything arises and exists by depending on other things. So there is nothing that arises and exists completely on *its own*, which if it did exist would be called “own-nature.” Another way of explaining this truth is to say, “All things are *empty* of such own-nature.” However, it takes deep wisdom after an enormous amount of study and practice to realize this truth. That is why it’s something that even the Dalai Lama deeply cherishes.

In this humorous scene, the Dalai Lama finds that the bag was *empty* because it didn’t contain a birthday present. There was nothing in it. So, he wisely makes a joke out of it by purposely using the same word, *empti-*

ness, which—as explained above—refers to a deep Buddhist insight.

I love the Dalai Lama's sense of humor, a quality that is found in people who are either Awakened or very much on the way to Awakening.

PAST LIFE

AMERICAN INTERVIEWER: I must ask you this question.

You are the fourteenth in the succession of reincarnated Dalai Lamas, who have died and were reborn. Do you remember anything from your past life?

DALAI LAMA: Do I remember my past life? Mmm. . . . To tell the truth, these days, I don't even remember what I did *yesterday*!

Comment: This actually took place on a TV show called “Nightline” on ABC at the end of an interview that Ted Koppel did with the Dalai Lama. Reincarnation reflects a long and enduring tradition, which cannot be done justice to by a simple question on a TV show in front of two million viewers. So, the Dalai Lama wisely responded with humor. After this, the interviewer Ted Koppel realized how inappropriate his question was, and he then turned red in the face out of embarrassment and apologized profusely.

Briefly, the tradition of a reincarnated Dalai Lama is several hundred years old. In this belief system, Tibetan Buddhists believe that their most highly ranked Tibetan monk, the Dalai Lama, is reborn after he dies. Then, in

this tradition, a search was initiated throughout Tibet to find that child, who then is educated and trained to become the next Dalai Lama.

SATORI AWAKENING

This is quoted from a description of a conversation between Shunryu Suzuki, a Zen master and the founder of the San Francisco Zen Center, and Huston Smith, a famous scholar of world religions. Prof. Smith says:

When, four months before his death, I had the opportunity to ask him why satori didn't figure in his book, his wife leaned toward me and whispered impishly, "It's because he hasn't had it," whereupon the [Suzuki] Roshi batted his fan at her in mock consternation and with finger to his lips hissed, "Shhhh! Don't tell him!"

When our laughter had subsided, he said simply, "It's not that satori is unimportant, but it's not the part of Zen that needs to be stressed."³

Comment: Satori refers to Awakening in Zen Buddhism. Suzuki Roshi had experienced satori, and because of it he attracted hundreds of capable and dedicated disciples and was able to found one of the largest and most vibrant centers of Buddhism in America.

People who have experienced satori are extremely

3. This story by Prof. Huston Smith is found in the preface of the well-known book by Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (Weatherhill, 1970), p. 9.

humble and feel no need to “show off.” They often have a playful sense of humor, as we see in the way he responded to his wife’s comment by saying, “Shhh! Don’t tell him!”

Misunderstandings or Slip-ups!

PRAYING

Three men go fishing in a small boat in a huge lake 20 miles wide. Suddenly, the boat capsizes in the middle of the lake, but the men manage to hang on to the capsized boat. They want to swim to the shore, but it is just too far away.

So, one of them says, “Well, guys, we got no choice but to *pray* to God.” He then says to one of the other two men, “So, you pray.” That man answers, “I’m an



atheist, and I don't believe in God." So, they turn to the other guy, who replies, "I'm a Buddhist, and we have Buddha who is a spiritual *teacher* but not God."

Frustrated, the first guy says, "OK then, I guess I have to do it. I don't go to church but I live next door to one, and I hear them *praying* all the time. I think I can remember the prayer,..." "O 69...B 5...I 21...G 40..."

Comment: Bingo games are popular activities as well as an important source of income at many churches and religious institutions, including the Buddhist temple in California that I served as minister for three years. What is hilarious is that this guy mistook the calling out of the Bingo letters and numbers for prayer!

ONENESS

A highly respected pioneer Buddhist priest in Chicago, Rev. Gyomay Kubose, loved the word "Oneness," which referred to ultimate truth. So, he often signed his books by writing "Oneness" next to his name. One day, he mistakenly wrote a wrong letter in the word, which made it sound hilarious.

He had written "Onemess"!

Comment: I can't adequately explain why I find this humorous. It's probably because as this highly respected senior priest tries to express the ultimate truth (Oneness), just a small error (between an "n" and an "m") ends up expressing something exactly the opposite (One mess)!

MY FACE IN BUDDHA

Many Jodo Shinshu Buddhists in America grew up with priests or ministers from Japan who did not speak English well. One third-generation Japanese American recalls how as a child he could not understand what his minister was saying when he led them in reciting the “Three Treasures” for he would say:

“I *putto* my *face* in Buddha, I *putto* my *face* in Dharma, I *putto* my *face* in Sangha.”

So the young boy wondered, “Do I put my face in Buddha?” Does this mean, “I *kiss* the Buddha?” He was confused.

The correct pronunciation was, “I *put* my *faith* in Buddha.”

Comment: It is not my intent to make fun of the minister’s English, for I appreciate the hardship that Buddhist priests from Asia faced as they strove to share the Dharma in America. They had to adjust to a new culture and learn to speak English well enough to talk about a difficult subject. For those Japanese priests who grew up in the 1930s and during the Second World War, when English was not taught in schools in Japan because English was considered an “enemy language,” fluency in English came much slower. They tried hard, but some still had difficulty with pronunciation.

By the way, that young boy is now a respected Buddhist priest. It could be that his “confusion” may have helped him to question and deepen his appreciation of

the teachings, which made him want to learn more and to eventually become a priest! So, confusion and doubt can be good and might be better than disinterest or apathy, because the former indicates that you are *interested*.

A MISUNDERSTANDING THAT MOTIVATED A BOY TO GO TO SUNDAY SCHOOL

When a Japanese American Jodo Shinshu Buddhist was a little boy, he went to Sunday School, in part, because he got candies for attending. So, he thought that all those years he was “praying” for the candies during the religious service when he chanted the last line of the sutra verses (*Junirai* or *The Twelve Verses of Bowing*), which was repeated many times. That line went “*koga chorai midason,*” meaning, “Thus, I bow to Amida Buddha.” However, not knowing Japanese very well, all those years he was actually chanting incorrectly, “*chodai chodai kudasai,*” meaning “Give me, give me, oh please give me!”

Comment: I really love this story, for it shows how the temples were an enjoyable and fun place for children. It is said the Buddha utilized numerous “skillful means” to share the teachings, so why not candies!

By the way, it worked for this little boy, for he has become a respected lay leader in the Buddhist Churches of America organization.

DHARMA DEBATE

Once a Korean Zen monk and a Tibetan lama met for a doctrinal debate at a gathering at Harvard University as hundreds looked on. It was an impressive sight when the

two eminent monks, in their flowing robes, entered the stage, attended by their disciples. The Korean Zen master began by thrusting out his arm, holding an orange. He then asked “*What is this?*” seeking an answer, which in Zen calls for a profound spiritual understanding.

Unaccustomed to this Zen style, the Tibetan lama seemed confused and turned toward his translator. As they whispered back and forth for several minutes as the hushed audience waited in great anticipation, the Tibetan translator finally addressed the crowd:

The Master says, “What is the matter with him? Don’t they have oranges where he comes from?”

The debate went no further!⁴

Comment: Buddhism is a world religion with many different branches and denominations, many of which have never interacted with each other. However, in America where all the major schools coexist, the different traditions are able to meet for the first time and to get to know each other. This was a great opportunity for a dialogue between the Korean Zen Buddhist teacher and the Tibetan Buddhist teacher, but the outcome turned out to be anticlimactic and comical, especially the Tibetan lama’s answer!

4. Mark Epstein, *Thoughts without a Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective* (Basic Books, A Division of Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), pp. 13–14.

Epilogue

As we come to the end of this book, I want to leave you with three reminders.

First, please do all that you can to become truly happy in life, which is what Buddhist Awakening is about. You have many years ahead of you in life, which will bring difficulties as well as joys. However, with Dharma on your side, you will be much better able to manifest that jewel within to help you deal with the difficulties that are sure to come your way.

If you are better able to deal with your difficulties, you will be a happier person. And the highest state of happiness is what we call “Awakening,” which is represented by the person we call the Buddha. We do not have to be *perfectly* awakened like the Buddha. The reality is that we won’t be. That’s because, unlike the monks and nuns who are living in a “pristine” environment, we lead lives within the challenges of family, school, work and society. So, we have done well if we have realized even a bit of what the Buddha attained. It will be to your own benefit and for those around you to do so.

I am convinced that you will be able to realize the

greater peace and happiness of Awakening if you apply and seek the Dharma with *sincerity* and *diligence* for any extended period of time. Remember that you already possess the jewel inside of you, which means you simply need to allow it to shine forth.

The second of my two ending reminders is especially for those of you who consider yourself Buddhist. Unlike the time when I was growing up in the '50s and early '60s, Buddhism, as I've pointed out in this book, is now much better known and accepted by many as a religion for *Americans*. Furthermore, Buddhism is one of the three major world religions and is the oldest among them.

So, there are these and many other reasons to be proud to be a Buddhist, but the best way to feel that pride is for you yourself to acquire good *knowledge* and personal *conviction* about Buddhism. I truly hope that this book has contributed even a tiny bit toward fostering in you these two goals: knowledge and conviction.

The third reminder is for you to do what you can to promote Buddhism and peace. The two are not separate. If you promote Buddhism, you will be contributing to peace.

You should, of course, not *impose* your beliefs onto others but share them with clarity and confidence when the conditions are right. Buddhists have tended to be shy about sharing and promoting their feelings and thoughts about their religion. So, *don't keep quiet* when you have an opportunity to discuss religion among your friends or at school or work. Also, if there are events at school or your workplace for personal sharing about religion,

volunteer to do what you can to present your knowledge and conviction about Buddhism.

One of the reasons for promoting Buddhism is to contribute to peace in the world, not just for Buddhists but also for people of all religions and of no religion. Further, peace should not be just for human beings, it should be for all living creatures; we should not bring unnecessary harm to animals, fish, birds, and insects. As the world becomes even more interconnected and interdependent as Indra's Net of Jewels reminds us, our actions will impact others near and far with much greater intensity.

This is clearly evident in the challenges we are facing with regard to climate change, for what one country does affects the rest of the world. Global warming and the rising of the sea levels have no boundaries.

Unfortunately, our generation has not done enough to stem the tide, for which I feel partly responsible and wish to apologize. I shall do whatever I can during the rest of the time that I have left on earth. So, let us, you and I, join all others who are already committed to this vital task.

This environmental issue is intimately related to the issue of peace. Needless to say, as the physical conditions worsen, we will witness and be affected by greater discord and suffering over food, water and air, leading to economic and political upheaval. Without a healthy physical environment, it will be difficult for us to realize the mental and spiritual peace that Buddhists seek. The objective outer world is intimately related to the subjective inner world. The two are not separate and both are need-

ed for greater peace. So, please do whatever you can to promote Buddhism for the goal of personal and world peace.

Make yourself the lamp.

Make the teachings the lamp.

(Buddha, *Nibbana Sutta*)

Appendix I

Important Dates in Buddhism and Christianity

YEAR	BUDDHISM	CHRISTIANITY
600	B.C.E. Buddha is born (ca. 566)	
500		
400		
300	King Ashoka takes reign (268) Theravada Buddhism goes to Sri Lanka	
200		
100	Mahayana Buddhism merges	
0	C.E.	Jesus of Nazareth is born

YEAR	BUDDHISM	CHRISTIANITY
100	Buddhism goes to China (ca. 100)	
	Buddhism goes to Vietnam	
200	Nagarjuna, Mahayana teacher	
300	Buddhism goes to Korea	Christianity becomes religion of Roman Empire (early 4th c.)
400	Buddhaghosa, Theravada teacher	Augustine clarifies doctrine (354)
	Vasubandhu, Mahayana teacher	
500		
	Buddhism goes to Japan	
600		
	Buddhism goes to Tibet	
700		
800		Charles Martel crowned Holy Roman Emperor (800)
	Pagan B. kingdom, Myanmar (849–1287)	
900		
1000		Split into Roman and Orthodox Churches (1054)
		First Crusades (1096–1099)

YEAR	BUDDHISM	CHRISTIANITY
1100		
1200	Buddhism disappears from India	Thomas Aquinas
1300		
1400		
1500		Martin Luther initiates Protestant movement (1517)
1600		Pilgrims arrive in Ameri- ca (1620)
1700		
1800	First B. Temple in America (1853)	
	Buddhists & Christians attend World Parliament of Religions in Chicago (1893)	
1900		
	Vietnamese monk's self-immolation or burning (1963)	Second Vatican Council (1962–1965)
2000	Dalai Lama receives Gold Medal Award from U.S. Congress (2006)	

Appendix II

Buddhists in the World¹

China	250 million
Southeast Asia	136 million
Japan	85 million
South Asia	24 million
Korea	11 million
Other areas in Asia	21 million
North America	3.9 million
Europe	1.3 million
Oceania	.7 million
Middle East & N. Africa	.5 million
S. America & Caribbean	.4 million
Africa	.2 million
Total worldwide	527 million

1. Based on the 2012 Pew Research Center survey of Buddhists in the world; only the Japan number is taken from a Japanese government survey since it is more accurate in my opinion.

Appendix III

Various Buddhist Traditions in the United States

As discussed earlier (See p. 14), I have classified the various traditions into the following four categories: 1) Older Asian American Buddhists (founded *before* 1945), 2) Newer Asian American Buddhists (founded *after* 1945), 3) Convert Buddhists whose main practice is meditation, and 4) Convert Buddhists whose main practice is chanting.

There will always be shortcomings with any system of classification, including this one. For example, the first group, the Older Asian American Buddhists, are now comprised of more and more priests and members who are *not* Asian American. So, please note that the first and the second group include a growing percentage of people who are not Asian American.

The organizations listed here are either regional or nationwide institutions or are individual temples or centers. The individual temples or centers are listed here because they are either the oldest and/or the largest in their tradition.

TRADITION	TEMPLE/ORGANIZATION	YEAR FOUNDED
Group 1: Older Asian American Buddhists		
Chinese/Chinese	Kong Chow Temple	1853
Pure Land/Japanese	Hompa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii	1889
Pure Land/Japanese	Jodo Mission of Hawaii	1894
Pure Land/Japanese	Higashi Honganji Mis- sion of Hawaii	1899
Pure Land/Japanese	Buddhist Churches of America	1899
Nichiren/Japanese	Nichiren Mission of Hawaii	1901
Zen/Japanese	Soto Buddhism Hawaii	1903
Pure Land/Japanese	Higashi Honganji Bud- dhist Temple	1904
Shingon/Japanese	Los Angeles Koyasan Betsuin	1912
Nichiren/Japanese	Los Angeles Nichiren Buddhist Temple	1914
Shingon/Japanese	Koyasan Shingon Mis- sion Hawaii	1914
Zen/Japanese	Zenshuji Soto Mission	1922
Pure Land/Japanese	Jodo-shu North Ameri- ca Buddhist Mission	1936
Group 2: Newer Asian American Buddhists		
Tendai/Japanese	Rissho Kosei-kai Tomoko Ozaki	1959
Taiwan/Chinese	Buddhist Association of the United States	1964

TRADITION	TEMPLE/ORGANIZATION	YEAR FOUNDED
Theravada/Sri Lanka	Washington (D.C.) Buddhist Vihara	1965
Taiwanese	Hsi Lai Temple	1967
Chinese	Dharma Realm Bud- dhist Association	1970
Tendai/Japanese	Shinnyo-En Hawaii	1971
Zen/Japanese	Daihonzan Chozenji	1972
Tendai/Japanese	Hawaii Tendai Mission	1972
Korean	Sambo Sa	1972
Thai	Wat Thai of Los Angeles	1972
Vietnamese	Chua Vietnam	1975
Laotian	Wat Lao Phouthavong	1979
Taiwanese	The Ch'an Meditation Center	1980
Cambodian	Khemara Buddhikaram Cambodian B.T.	1980
Burmese	Burmese Buddhist Association	1987
Taiwanese	The Buddhist Compas- sion Relief	1989

**Group 3: Convert Buddhists whose main practice is
meditation: Zen**

Sambo Zen/Japanese	Diamond Sangha	1959
Soto Zen/Japanese	San Francisco Zen Center	1962
Rinzai Zen/Japanese	Rinzai Zen Dojo	1962
Rinzai Zen/Japanese	Zen Studies Society	1964

TRADITION	TEMPLE/ORGANIZATION	YEAR FOUNDED
Sambo Zen/Japanese	Rochester Zen Center	1966
Sambo Zen/Japanese	Los Angeles Zen Center	1967
Soto Zen/Japanese	Shasta Abbey	1970
L.A. Zen Center	Zen Center of New York	1979
L.A. Zen Center	White Plum Sangha	1979
L.A. Zen Center	Zen Mountain Monastery	1980
Zen/Korean	Buddhist Society for Contemplative Wisdom	1980
Zen/Korean	Kwan Um School of Zen	1983
Zen/Vietnamese	Community of Mindful Living	1983
Rochester Zen Center	Springwater Center for Meditative Inquiry and Retreats	1990

**Group 3: Convert Buddhists whose main practice is
meditation: Tibetan**

Khagyü/Tibetan	Shambhala International	1970
Nyingma/Tibetan	Nyingma Institute	1973
Gelugpa/Tibetan	Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition	1975
Khagyü/Tibetan	Karma Triyana Dharmachakra	1979

TRADITION	TEMPLE/ORGANIZATION	YEAR FOUNDED
Nyingma/Tibetan	Dzogchen Foundation (MA)	1996
Group 3: Convert Buddhists whose main practice is meditation: Theravada		
Theravada/Thai	Insight Meditation Society	1975
Theravada/Burma	Dhamma Dena	1977
Theravada/Thai	Spirit Rock	1988
Theravada/Thai	Metta Forest Monastery	1991
Theravada/Thai & British	Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery	1995
Group 4: Convert Buddhists whose main practice is chanting		
Sokagakkai/Japanese	Sokagakkai International—USA	1960

Appendix IV

Relating to Other Religions

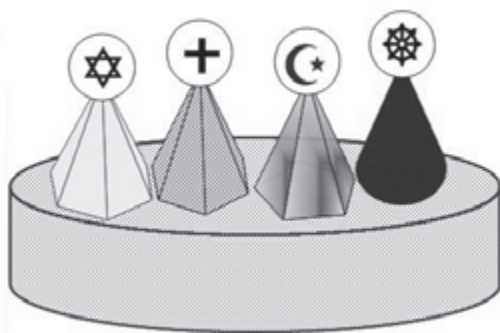
As a Buddhist, I share the following basic attitude toward other religions:

1. Respectful: We respect other religions and honor their members' hopes to realize the goals of the religion.
2. Voluntary: We believe that the choice of religion is personal and voluntary.
3. Oneness: All people and beings are interconnected and make up the same world that we share. So, we share a lot more in common in our religious outlook than we think.

Among people of all faith traditions, there are basically four kinds of commonly held attitudes toward other religions.

1. One True Path (Exclusive): There is only one true path to the top of the mountain, and it is

- ours. Other religions aim to reach the top but are unable to get there because they are false.
2. One Complete Path (Inclusive): Many religions aim to reach the same mountaintop, but only our religion can accomplish that. Others are not false but are incomplete. So they must join and be included within our religion, which offers the only path for reaching the top.
 3. Many Paths (Pluralistic 1): There are many different paths to get to the top of the mountain. And they are *equally valid* paths that lead to the same goal.
 4. Many Mountains (Pluralistic 2): Unlike the former three, the religions are not different paths on the *same* mountain but paths on separate and *different* mountains. This view acknowledges the *uniqueness* of each religion but also the belief that when the seekers reach the top of their respective mountains their views are *similar* with much more in common than differences.
 5. Different Peaks on the Same Mountain Range (Pluralistic 3): This position embraces the uniqueness of religions as in the previous position, yet regards religions not as separate mountains but as different *peaks* on the *same* mountain range. This view is, then, able to capture the truth that religions share not only the same earth but also the same aspiration to realize ultimate happiness and meaning as members belonging to the same human species.



I take the fifth position (Different Peaks on the *Same* Mountain Range) because it respects not only the uniqueness of each religion but also acknowledges that members of each religion can reach the top of their respective peaks.

It also reminds us that the religions share the same space (earth), have the same aspiration (salvation/liberation), and of the same species (*homo sapiens*). By taking this position, we believe that the many religions found in this country and the rest of the world can coexist in the spirit of mutual respect and active cooperation.

Appendix V

Buddhist Holidays

The following are the holidays that are common to most schools or traditions of Buddhism in America. They are mostly related to the major events in the life of Shakyamuni Buddha. It is interesting that the various denominations observe them at different times of the year.

The holidays specific to the various schools or denominations are not listed here, for they would be too numerous to name; readers are recommended to check with the respective traditions.

New Year's Day Many cultural traditions have their own celebration dates, but in the U.S. they may observe the new year on January 1 in accord with the American holiday. Others celebrate according to the lunar calendar, which usually falls in February.

Buddha's Birthday

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| April 8th | Japanese based schools: It is often called "Flower Festival" to remind us of the joy and the abundance of flowers in the Lumbini Garden when he was born. |
| April–May | Theravada schools: It is called "Vesak" and celebrated on the full moon of the fifth lunar month. Three major events in the Buddha's life are celebrated at Vesak: Buddha's 1) birthday, 2) Awakening or Enlightenment, and 3) passing. |

Buddha's Awakening/Enlightenment

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| April–May | Theravada schools: It is called "Vesak" and celebrated on the full moon of the fifth lunar month along with the Buddha's Awakening and passing. |
| December 8th | Japanese based schools |

Buddha's passing

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| February 15 | Japanese based schools |
| April–May | Theravada schools: It is called "Vesak" and celebrated on the full moon of the fifth lunar month along with the Buddha's birth and Awakening. |

Parents' Day

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Seventh lunar month | Vietnamese tradition: It is the day to express gratitude to the parents. |
|---------------------|--|

Appendix VI

Buddhist Scouting in America

Types of Buddhist Scouts Award Programs

Padma Award: A four-part program for Girl Scouts. “Padma” is a Buddhist term that refers to a Lotus flower, which is one of the most well-known Buddhist symbols in all denominations of Buddhism. The Lotus flower grows out of the mud of suffering to blossom into a pure and exquisitely beautiful flower of Awakening.

The award medal consists of a pendant, ribbon, and bar.

- Brownies receive a chocolate brown medal and certificate



Buddhist Padma Award
For Girls Scouts

- Juniors receive a bronze medal and certificate
- Cadettes receive a silver and certificate
- Seniors receive a silver pin and certificate

Metta Award: A program for Cub Scouts. “Metta” is a Buddhist term meaning “loving kindness and goodwill.” This program seeks to nurture boys who can relate to all beings with loving kindness and goodwill in their hearts.

The Metta Medal consists of a pendant representing the Buddhist Wheel of Dharma attached to a bar with the word “Metta” on it.



Karuna Award: A program for Camp Fire USA members. “Karuna” is a Buddhist term meaning “compassion” or “loving kindness.” The award program asks its participants to become a Bodhisattva at heart, someone who deeply cares for all living beings.



Sangha Award: A program for Boy Scouts. “Sangha” is a Buddhist term meaning “brotherhood.” The Sangha Award medal consists of pendant, ribbon and a bar. The pendant is the Wheel of Dharma, a symbol for the spreading of Dharma, meaning the “teachings.” The Wheel is suspended from a multi-colored ribbon representing the aura of Buddha’s many virtues. The colors are the same as those of the Buddhist flag.



Buddhist Sangha Award
For Boy Scouts, Explorers & Venture Crew members

Administration

For detailed information, search on the web for:

National Buddhist Committee on Scouting

The Committee is located at:

National Buddhist Committee on Scouting

Buddhist Churches of America

1710 Octavia Street

San Francisco, California 94109

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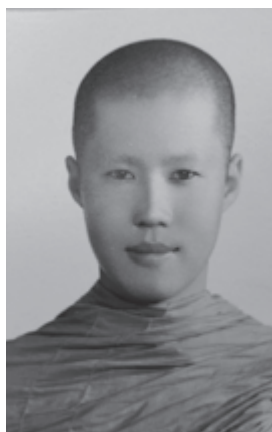
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Dr. Kenneth Kenshin Tanaka spent his youth in northern California, in what has come to be called “Silicon Valley.” After attending public schools in the city of Mountain View, he received his higher education at San Jose State Univ. and Stanford Univ. (B.A., Cultural Anthropology), a temple in Thailand (as a monk), Institute of Buddhist Studies (IBS), Berkeley, California (M.A., Buddhist Studies), Tokyo University (M.A., Indian Philosophy), and Univ. of California at Berkeley (Ph.D., Buddhist Studies).

He served as Associate Professor and Assistant Dean at IBS for 10 years and a resident priest for three years at the Southern Alameda County Buddhist Church (Jodo Shinshu) in northern California. During the early 1990s he served as President of the Buddhist Council of Northern California for several years. He, then, taught as Professor of Buddhist Studies at Musashino University in Tokyo for 20 years, 1998–2018.

Dr. Tanaka currently serves as Chairman of the Editorial Committee of the Chinese Buddhist Canon En-



The author as novice Theravada novice monk at Wat (Temple) Borwaneewais in Bangkok, Thailand; taken in December, 1970

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Dr. Tanaka was the 2017 recipient of the 27th Nakamura Hajime Eastern Study Prize, awarded by the Eastern Institute and the Indian Embassy in Tokyo to scholars who distinguish themselves in the field of Indian and Buddhist studies. He has appeared in a number of radio and T.V. programs in both the U.S. and Japan.

His three grown children all reside in the U.S., whose occupations are in social justice, education, and pharmaceutical research. He recently became the proud grandfather to Paxton, who represents the sixth generation of his family in America.



Requesting Input from Readers

The author, Kenneth Tanaka, seeks questions and comments (including any errors, omissions, improvements, etc.) for his continuing effort to improve the book for future editions. Please send email to him at:

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