

**Buddhism as an
Education
&
To Understand
Buddhism**



Venerable Master Chin Kung

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as an
Education

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Printed in Taiwan
1000 Copies; 2012 May
HZ50-09-01

CHAPTER ONE

THE CAUSE OF OUR CHAOTIC WORLD

Today's societies in Taiwan and elsewhere in the world are rather abnormal, a phenomenon that has not been witnessed before either in the West or the East. Some Westerners have predicted that the end of the world will occur in 1999 and that Christ will return to earth for Judgement Day. Easterners have also predicted impending disasters that are similar to those predictions in the West, the only difference being the time frame, which is some twenty years later. Some of these are ancient prophecies, which we should not place too much importance on. However, if we view our environment objectively, we will realize that this world is really in danger.

Environmental pollution has become a serious problem and now humankind has finally begun to understand the need for protecting our environment. However, the problem of mental or spiritual pollution is many times more serious than that of the environment. This is the source of worldly ills that not many people realize. The Chinese have a saying, "Education is most essential to establish a nation, train its leaders and its people." For centuries, the Chinese have always believed in the primacy of education,

which is considered the foundation for a peaceful and prosperous society. It provides the solution to a myriad of social ills and leads the way to changing one's suffering into happiness. Education has a strong impact on the nation and its people. Moreover, elementary school is the foundation, the basic building block in an educational system.

CHAPTER TWO

BUDDHISM AS AN EDUCATION

Buddhism officially came to China in 67 AD. The Emperor had sent special envoys to India to invite Buddhist monks to come to China to teach Buddhism, which in that period, was regarded as an educational system, and not as a religion. Regretfully, about two hundred years ago, the practice of Buddhism had taken on a more religious facade. Therefore, the purpose of this talk is to correct this misunderstanding, by leading us back to the original form of Buddhism as taught by Buddha Shakyamuni.

The Goal of the Buddha's Teaching

Buddhism is Buddha Shakyamuni's educational system, which is similar to that of Confucius for both presented similar viewpoints and methods. The goal of Buddhist education is to attain wisdom. In Sanskrit, the language of ancient India, the Buddhist wisdom was called "Anuttara-samyak-sambhodi" meaning the perfect ultimate wisdom. The Buddha taught us that the main objective of our practice or cultivation was to achieve this ultimate wisdom. He further taught us that everyone has the potential to realize this state of ultimate wisdom, as it is an intrinsic part of

our nature, not something one obtains externally. However, most of us have become confused through general misconceptions and therefore, are not able to realize this potential. Therefore, if we break through this confusion, we will realize this intrinsic part of our nature. Thus, Buddhism is an educational system aimed at regaining our own intrinsic nature. It also teaches absolute equality which stemmed from Buddha's recognition that all sentient beings possess this innate wisdom and nature. Therefore, there is no inherent difference among beings. Everyone is different now because we have lost our true nature and have become confused. The degree of wisdom exhibited by individuals depends on the degree of delusion and has nothing to do with the true nature of the individual. The Buddha's teaching helps us to realize that innate, perfect, ultimate wisdom. With wisdom, we can then solve all our problems and turn suffering into happiness. Due to our lack of wisdom, we perceive, view and behave foolishly, and thus suffer the consequences evoked by our incorrect actions. If we have wisdom, our thoughts, viewpoints and behavior will be correct; how then can we suffer when there are no ill consequences to suffer from? Of course, we will be happy. From here, we can see that suf-

fering is caused by delusion and the source of happiness is our own realization of wisdom.

The Core of the Buddha's Teaching

The Buddha's teaching contains three major points: discipline, meditation and wisdom. Wisdom is the goal and deep meditation or concentration is the crucial process toward achieving wisdom. Discipline through observing the precepts, is the method that helps one to achieve deep meditation; wisdom will then be realized naturally. Buddha's entire teachings as conveyed in the sutras never really depart from these three points. Buddhism encompasses the entire collection of works by Buddha Shakyamuni and is called the Tripitaka. This can be classified into three categories: sutra, vinaya (precepts or rules), and sastra (commentaries) which emphasize meditation, discipline, and wisdom respectively.

The Buddhist Educational Organization in China

Buddhist education is based on filial piety, as is the Chinese culture. Prior to the introduction of Buddhism to China, filial piety was the pillar of society and was supported by the wise men of ancient

China. When Buddhist monks from India came to China and started to discuss Buddhism with government officials, it was immediately apparent to everyone that Buddhism shared numerous similarities with the indigenous Confucian traditions. Consequently, the government embraced them and requested that the monks stay in China permanently.

The first two monks, who came to China, Moton and Chufarlan, were received by the "Hong-Lu-Si" which is equivalent to our present Foreign Ministry or State Department. "Si" was designated as a ministry of the government. The Chief of Hong-Lu-Si is equivalent to a foreign minister or Secretary of State. However, Hong-Lu-Si could only receive foreign guests temporarily. In order to allow them to stay permanently, the Emperor added another ministry, "Bai-Ma-Si," to take charge of Buddhist education. Originally, the "Si" had nothing to do with a temple, but merely denoted a ministry of the imperial court, now it denotes a temple in contemporary Chinese. So, there were two ministries in charge of education. The "Li-Bu," managed by the Prime Minister, was in charge of the traditional Confucian educational system. This organization served the same function until the early 1900's. As the Emperor had given enormous support to the "Bai-Ma-Si," Buddhist education

rapidly spread throughout China. In many instances, it had even far exceeded the efforts to educate people than the traditional education system of "Li-Bu." Consequently, there may not have been a Confucian or Manfucian school in every village, but there was a "Si" everywhere. Again, the Buddhist "Si", or temple, used to be an educational institution and did not perform religious ceremonies at all, unlike what often takes place in contemporary temples nowadays.

Another important mission for the original "Si" was sutra translation. The scale of the translation effort is hard to imagine today. During the seventh century, the famous monk Xuan-Tsuang had supervised six hundred scholars in sutra translation. Prior to this, a monk named Kumaraja had a translation team of about four hundred scholars. Therefore, the "Si" was a large governmental organization. Unfortunately, it was completely transformed into a place to deal with superstition and spirits around two hundred years ago. Its educational characteristics totally disappeared, which was truly regretful.

The Four Current Types of Buddhism

Today, there are four types of Buddhism being

practiced. First, there is the religious Buddhism, which can be witnessed in temples throughout Taiwan. However, this does not represent the real Buddhism. Second, there is the academic Buddhism being taught in many universities today, where we see Buddhism being treated purely as philosophy, an academic pursuit, especially in Japan. This is not exactly Buddha's education either. Third, and the most unfortunate of all, is the total degeneration of Buddhism into a cult. This third type of Buddhism is much more damaging to the public than the first two types. Finally, there is the traditional Buddhism, the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni in its true essence, which is very rare in our day and age.

CHAPTER THREE

THE AUTHOR'S OWN EXPERIENCE WITH BUDDHISM

When I was a young student in Nanjing, I did not believe in any religion. I went to church with some classmates to learn about Christianity. Although I tried to understand it, I could not find a way to accept it. My favorite religion at that time was Islam because its emphasis was on moral principles and ethics, and I thought that this was rare among religions. When I encountered Buddhism back then, the monks were not very convincing. Therefore, I could not accept Buddhism either and it was the one I resisted the most. I was too young at that time and had not met a true practitioner.

After I arrived in Taiwan, I heard of Professor Dong-Mei Fang, who was then a famous philosopher and a professor at the National Taiwan University. Having become an admirer of his, I wrote him a letter asking about taking a class from him at the university. Professor Fang was only in his forties at that time. He invited me to his house and told me, "Nowadays in school, professors do not act like professors, and students do not act like students either. If you come to the university and expect to learn something, you will be sorely disappointed." When I heard this, I was

pretty upset since he had basically poured cold water over my plans. Finally, he told me: "Well, why don't you come to my house every Sunday, and I will give you personal instruction for two hours." I could not believe that he was so compassionate towards me. I learned about philosophies at Professor Fang's small table in his little living room, one on one. This was extremely precious to me. He introduced the philosophies of the West, China, India and finally Buddhism. He taught me that Buddhism is the pinnacle of the world's philosophy and that it provides the greatest enjoyment for humanity. What he told me was fascinating and soon I realized that Buddhism contained something magnificent. I started to visit the temples in Taipei. However, the monks I met in those temples just could not clearly explain Buddhism to an intellectual skeptic like me. However, the monks are much better in teaching Buddhism today. Then I set my first sight on Shan-Dao-Si, which was a large temple in Taipei with a vast collection of sutras. During that period of time, the wide publication and circulation of Buddhist books was very rare. The monks at Shan-Dao-Si were extremely kind to me as they allowed me to borrow many of the precious and rare sutras. This was a great help to me.

Soon after I started to learn Buddhism seriously, I

was fortunate to meet Master Zhang-Jia. He was a well-accomplished Esoteric practitioner who taught and guided me in my study and practice. Just like Mr. Fang, he taught me two hours every week for three years until he passed away. I then went to Taizhong to follow Mr. Bing-Nan Lee and started studying and practicing with him.

Buddhism is a special kind of knowledge; it is not a religion. In order to derive true benefit from it, we have to understand its true nature. I have the utmost respect for Buddhism and I believe Buddha Shakyamuni to be the foremost educator in the history of the world. He was just like Confucius in that he taught everyone tirelessly and without discrimination.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE METHODOLOGY AND SYMBOLISM OF THE
BUDDHIST EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The Continuing Education System for Teachers

The continuing education system for teachers was first established by Buddha Shakyamuni. Many of his students were well accomplished under his instruction. Every year, these students were assigned to teach at different places for nine months. In India, the rainy season runs from mid-April to mid-July. Since it was inconvenient to travel and teach during those three months, all the students would come back to meet with the Buddha to receive additional teachings and to learn from each other in class discussions. This was called the summer retreat and it parallels what is currently known as continuing education for teachers. The modern continuing educational system is necessitated by the advancement in technology. However, twenty-five hundred years ago, Buddha had already adopted this idea in bringing his students back for additional teachings.

The Artful Buddhist Teaching

Buddhist teaching is full of artistic expressions. It

was originally an education, which combined what was equivalent to today's museum and school system. Therefore, the "Si" combined the traditional school, library and museum. In ancient China, the traditional school system was not universal. Most students went to a "Si" to study because it usually had a complete collection of books, similar to today's library. The collections included not only sutras, but also almost every kind of publication. The monks were familiar with Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and ancient Chinese texts. They were capable of answering questions and were well versed on various subjects. Consequently, Buddhist institutions began to take over the educational mission for China.

Typical Buddhist buildings are expressions of art, which are called "Expressions of Buddhism." However, Buddha and Bodhisattva statues do not represent polytheism, the worship of more than one god. Each statue serves to inspire wisdom and awakening in each of us. They also represent certain aspects of Buddhism, which remind practitioners of the particular topic of teaching. For example, Guan Yin Bodhisattva, the most popular Bodhisattva in China, represents Infinite Compassion. When we see this statue, it reminds us to apply compassion when dealing with the world, its people and surroundings.

However, people nowadays worship Guan Yin Bodhisattva as a god and pray for the relief of suffering and to eliminate obstacles. This is a superstitious view and misconception because people forget the fact that the statues are expressions of concepts in Buddhism.

Buddhist architecture is also an artistic expression, with the temple's main cultivation hall being similar to a large meeting or teaching hall. From the exterior, it appears to have two stories, but there is only one story inside. The external two stories represent "absolute truth" or the true reality of life and the universe, and "relative truth" or worldly views still clouded with delusion. The interior single story illustrates that both are the same truth. To the deluded, the two appear distinct and different; however, to the enlightened, they are one and the same.

In the center of the main cultivation hall, there are three statues, one Buddha and two Bodhisattvas. Buddha represents the true nature of the universe and human life, which is called "Buddha nature" or true mind. "Buddha" is translated from Sanskrit, and means someone who is totally enlightened. The Buddha statue represents our original enlightenment and the Bodhisattvas statues represent the application of our original enlightened mind. All the repre-

sentations and applications are infinite and can be classified into two categories: wisdom and practice. For example, the Pure Land School pays respect to the Buddha and two Bodhisattvas of the Western Paradise. Amitabha Buddha (Infinite Life and Infinite Light) represents the infinite enlightenment that is an intrinsic part of our nature. Bodhisattvas Guan Yin and Da Shi Zhi (Great Strength or Mahasthamaprapta) respectively portray compassion with kindness and great wisdom. We should be compassionate and kind toward all beings. Our thoughts, views and behavior should be rational rather than emotional, for emotional behavior spells trouble. Therefore, we should not treat the Buddha and Bodhisattvas as gods. But will they help us? Yes, they will by providing us with the knowledge of how to protect ourselves from delusion, thereby obtaining release from suffering. Once we have learned the background of the artistic components in Buddhist architecture, music and statues, we will gain an enriched experience when paying a visit to a traditional Buddhist temple.

However, nowadays many people do not understand the meaning and teachings of Buddhism. They mistake the multi-representations of Bodhisattvas as a sign of polytheism. What people fail to understand

is the fact that the statues in Buddhism are teaching aids and not statues of gods. All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas represent our nature and cultivation of virtue. We have infinite capabilities within our true nature that cannot be expressed by just one single term. Therefore, we have multiple representations; for instance, a capable person today may have many titles on his/her business cards to show his/her positions and accomplishments. The Buddha and Bodhisattvas are actually representations of the nature within ourselves: Buddha, as in our true nature of mind, and the Bodhisattvas, in our virtue of cultivation. We all possess these qualities. Not until we come to realize the meaning of Buddhist symbolism, will we appreciate the sophistication and completeness of its education.

Typical "Si" buildings are rare today. The first hall of a "Si" is the hall of Heavenly Guardians, also known as Dharma Protectors. Situated in the center of the hall, facing the front door, is Mi Le Pu Sa (Maitreya Bodhisattva) who is represented by the image of the historical monk Bu-Dai. Mi Le Pu Sa has a big smile that conveys the idea that in order to truly learn Buddhism, one should learn to be cheerful and courteous to all. He also has a huge belly that represents fairness, flexibility, impartiality, patience and toler-

ance.

Standing beside Mi Le Pu Sa are the four Heavenly Guardians or Dharma Protectors. They are symbolic guardians of the practitioners of the Buddhist way. Whom do they protect? They protect us by reminding us to educate ourselves and to safeguard the proper knowledge, which we should learn. Each guardian portrays a different aspect of thought or action.

The Eastern Dharma Protector (holding a lute) symbolizes responsibility and safeguards the territory, which means that all of us are responsible for ourselves, our family, society and the country as a whole. If each of us performs our duties well, fulfilling our obligations, we support each other and ourselves as well. The Southern Dharma Protector (holding a sword) symbolizes progress and teaches us diligence. He emphasizes the importance of constantly cultivating and advancing our virtue, wisdom and knowledge, and to improve performance in ourselves and our duties. This is similar to Confucian ideas of daily self-improvement.

The Western Dharma Protector (holding a dragon or snake) symbolizes comprehensive vision and knowledge gained through exposure to the world. He represents the need to open our eyes to

observe nature and man, to refine what we see and learn, and to distinguish good from ill. The Northern Dharma Protector (holding an umbrella) symbolizes comprehensive study and learning. Both teach ways of practice and how to achieve the goals in responsibility fulfillment and self-improvement. As the ancient Chinese have said: "To read ten thousand books and to travel ten-thousand miles." We read to gain more knowledge and travel to observe more effectively. We will then be able to improve ourselves and to perform our duties most effectively.

Today, people visit the Hall of Dharma Protectors to burn incense, prostrate and offer flowers and fruit praying for protection and safety. This is superstition. All the facilities, images of Buddha and Bodhisattvas and any offerings made are teaching tools designed to inspire our mind and wisdom. They also serve to remind us of the importance of being enlightened instead of deluded, virtuous instead of deviated, pure instead of polluted. These are the three principles of Buddhist teaching and practice.

Methods of Practicing Buddhism

The ways in practicing Buddhism are numerous, about eighty-four thousand. Each path is different

from the others but ultimately leads to the same goals: enlightenment, proper thoughts and viewpoints, and purity. As such, all paths are equal without one being superior to the other. People have different abilities and levels of accomplishment. Furthermore, they are from different environments and should choose a path most suited to them. We can choose any one of the three goals to concentrate our practice on. When we achieve any one of them, the other two will come naturally.

There are ten schools of practice in Chinese Buddhism. Zen stresses the pursuit of the perfect clear mind or enlightenment. The Pure Land and Tibetan Buddhism or Vajrayana school stress obtaining the pure mind. Other schools concentrate their practice on proper thoughts and viewpoints. Regardless of which method or school one chooses, they all lead to the same outcome. In other words, once we become expert in one method, we will become an expert in all methods.

The purity of the world comes from an individual's inner purity. With a pure mind, a mind without discrimination or attachment, a higher level of wisdom arises in which the world around us naturally comes into harmony. By reciting the Buddha's name, meditating, reciting sutras or mantras, and

practicing in accordance with Buddha's teaching, one will attain enlightenment, proper thoughts and viewpoints, and purity of mind thus becoming void of all deluded thoughts.

On the other hand, one is totally on the wrong path if one chants Buddha's name in the hope of gaining a promotion or wealth. That is religion and superstition, and it goes against the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha.

How Buddhist Terminology Illustrates that Buddhism is an Education

Buddhism is the teaching of Buddha Shakyamuni as he was its founder. We call Him the "Original teacher," just like the Chinese call Confucius the "Greatest sage and teacher." The relationship between Buddha and ourselves is a teacher-student relationship, which is not religious in nature. In religion, there is not a teacher-student relationship but that of parent-child or master-servant.

About twenty years ago I gave a series of lectures in Fu-Ren Catholic University and taught in the Thomas Monastery for one semester. I told my students, who were mainly priests and nuns, to take refuge in the Buddha and to learn Buddhism well.

There is absolutely no conflict between Buddhism and religion, for one is teacher-student and the other father-son. If the priests and nuns were to practice Buddhism and in turn abandon their own religion, I believe that even Buddha would not accept them, for it is against human ethics to discard the parent for the teacher. Therefore, religious followers will benefit if they practice Buddhism. As we practice, we will attain the true wisdom to know exactly what Heaven is like and will be able to decide when and how we want to go there. Thus, Buddhism is a way of teaching as it teaches us how to regain our true wisdom.

When a monk is called "He-Shang," he is equivalent to the principal in today's school, for he is the director of educational strategies. All other faculty members are teachers who execute the principal's educational strategies and act as role models for the students' behavior and speech. My late teacher, Professor Fang constantly assured me that Buddhism is an education. Later in my studies of the sutras, I reaffirmed his statement that Buddhism is the pinnacle of the world's wisdom. It provides the greatest enjoyment for humankind. I have experienced the unsurpassable joy of being free from afflictions, delusions and wandering thoughts. My body and mind are clean and pure, totally at ease. I

am the happiest person in the world. Therefore, I feel indebted to Professor Fang, for without him, I would not have learned Buddhism nor would I have such complete happiness derived from practicing Buddha's teaching.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INTEGRATION OF CONFUCIANISM AND BUDDHISM

Buddhism successfully merged into Chinese culture; they became inseparable. The basic concept that they share is to give up one's own interest for the sake of others. Confucianism and Buddhism advocate the enhancement and glorification of filial piety, the respect and devotion of an individual for their parents and teachers. Filial piety is a major element in accomplishing world peace.

What is education? It is the meaning and the value of human life, the relationships between human beings as well as those between humans and the universe. Confucian teaching encompasses three main points. First, it is important to understand the relationship between humans, once this is understood we will learn to love people. Second, it is important to understand the relationship between humans and heaven, once this is understood we will learn to respect heavenly beings and spirits. Third, it is important to understand the relationship between humans and the environment, once this is understood we will learn to take care of the environment and to appreciate every single thing around us.

There are four studies within Confucian teachings: virtue, speech, skills for earning a living and the arts. The teaching of virtue is the core of Confucianism; it is absolutely crucial, for without morality and proper conduct we become selfish and concerned only with ourselves at the expense of society. Such behavior can result in world chaos. Today, our education has lost that emphasis. Schools only teach skills that are superficial and not the root of education. When the root is rotten, it shakes the foundation of society and causes the chaos that we are experiencing today. Elementary schools are like the root of education: junior highs, high schools, and colleges are the flowers and leaves. Teachers can start teaching filial piety to our children as early as possible.

By looking at the way Chinese characters were created, we cannot but admire our ancestor's high level of wisdom. We thank them for having given us something that is so valuable and exquisite. The Chinese character "piety" embraces the spirit of Buddhism and the foundation of education as it is a combination of the characters for "old" and "son." Nowadays, people talk about the generation gap between parents and children, which is something traditional families did not have. In the Chinese tradi-

tion, not only are father and son one unit; grandfathers and grandsons, etc. are all part of the same continuum. This is a unique concept. Westerners often ask why Chinese people pay respect to ancestors since we barely know them. The remembrance of our ancestors is the foundation of Confucianism and Buddhism, which is the source of harmony in society and peace in the world.

Today everyone longs for world peace, but we need to start from the foundation of filial piety to obtain it. Buddhism emphasizes unconditional compassion for all sentient beings in the universe and beyond; in the past, present and future. The continuum of time and space is inseparable from oneself, for **We Are All One Entity**. One does not find this extensive concept in religion. "Thus Come One", one of the ten names for Buddha, stands for an enlightened being, which is our basic nature, and also the essence of the universe and human life. This concept is embodied by the Chinese character "piety" and the name of Amitabha Buddha in the Pure Land School. The names may be different but the meanings are the same: unconditional love for all beings that surpasses space and time.

The Five Human Relationships

Confucian teachings are based on five human relationships that are founded on moral principles. The five human relationships include those between husband/wife, parent/child, siblings, friends, and political leaders and the public. Husband/wife represents the smallest and the most intimate circle of human relationships. Outside the small circle is the extended family, which includes the relationships between father and son and those among the siblings. Outside the family there is society which includes additional relationships between the individual and his leader and circles of friends. We now often talk about the need to unite people. In ancient times, the Chinese had no use for the word "unite," for the five human relationships define the union of all people. Everyone on this earth is our brother. Each is responsible for the other; parents being compassionate, sons and daughters being filial to their parents, siblings and friends being respectful to each other. In this way, the country and its people are already a perfect union. The relationships between people also define responsibilities from one to the other. Everyone has his own duty and responsibility to fulfill.

The Practice of Confucianism and Buddhism

Human beings differ from animals by adhering to human relationships and basic moral principles. The practice of Confucianism is based on having sincere and proper thoughts, correct behavior, a well-organized and harmonious family and country, and peace for all. This is identical to the views of Buddhism, which also emphasizes practicing and learning. It all starts from generating the Bodhicitta mind. "Bodhi" is a Sanskrit word meaning enlightenment. Enlightenment means an "awakened" mind. It is similar to the sincere thought and proper mind advocated by Confucianism. A Chinese government official defined sincerity very well. He noted that "Sincerity means having no single thought." There will be no sincerity as long as there are corrupted thoughts, wandering thoughts, or even the rise of a single thought. His definition is identical to that of Buddhism. The Sixth Patriarch Hui-Neng once said "... (the pure mind) contains nothing therefore collects no dust" However, people in general have a lot of wandering thoughts. How can one be rid of these wandering thoughts? The Confucian answer is "...to fight against uprising desires and achieve wisdom." This practice was stressed in the elementary

school of the Confucian system. Buddha said, severing all desires is to stop all worries and troubles.

The Confucian Elementary School System

In the past, the Chinese elementary school students were well trained to guard against the uprising of desires. Schools emphasized training in student's concentration and wisdom. Students started school at the age of seven. They stayed with their teachers and only went home during holidays. They were taught the correct way to interact with everyday life and the proper manner to attend to their teachers and elder schoolmates. This was called the education of moral principles based on human relationships. When the children went home, they would then treat their parents and siblings with filial piety and respect.

From the ages of seven to twelve, students were required to memorize and recite fluently the ancient texts. The teacher would first select materials which contained the profound wisdom of sages and saints and then encouraged the students to read and recite the material up to one or two hundred times a day. Children would have scattered thoughts if they were not assigned any tasks to do. The purpose of

reciting was to focus their mind so that they would eventually obtain a pure mind, concentration and wisdom; even though, they may not have understood the meanings. However, the current educational system, in existence since the Revolution of 1911, eliminated this two thousand-year-old tradition and adopted the western educational system. This change, upon close examination, leads one to the root of modern China's social problems.

The Confucian Tai School System

At the age of thirteen, children were sent to Tai school, as there were no junior or high schools in ancient China. Tai school emphasized the analysis and discussion of the materials students had already memorized in elementary school. The teachers were experts in their fields and would concentrate on that field throughout their entire career. Each of them taught a small class with ten to twenty students and the lectures were not necessarily given in the classroom with textbooks. During that period, all the textbooks were printed in the universal format: twenty words per column and ten columns per page, with no space in between. The format was standard for the entire country regardless of the publisher. Both

teacher and students memorized the textbooks so well that they even knew exactly where the study materials were located. Since everything had been memorized earlier, there was no need for books after elementary school.

Teachers often took their students on field trips to broaden their knowledge and experience. As they traveled, knowledge was imparted to them along the way. Thus, the trips were without textbooks or restraints but accompanied with wine and food and filled with joy. The students would attend to the needs of the teacher. Therefore, as they concluded their travels to the many beautiful places, the course would close as well. For many, attending Tai school was the most joyful time of their lives.

In Taiwan, those who are in their eighties or nineties may have experienced this kind of education. My late teacher, Mr. Lee, then in his nineties, could still apply materials he had memorized in elementary school when writing articles; no reference materials were needed. This was the method he used to acquire the original wisdom that comes from the pure mind. With the pure mind, true wisdom arises. Having true wisdom is to know a person's past and future and also to understand the laws of cause and effect. One should not judge things by their appearance,

but know and understand how events came about. The wisdom of knowing nothing emphasized in Buddhism is the original wisdom. Only when one has a pure mind, which contains nothing, will he also know everything when he is in contact with the external world. Therefore, the practicing and studying of Buddhism begins with eliminating all thoughts in order to obtain a pure mind.

All this made me think of our children, who are so pure, so innocent and uncontaminated in their thinking which is why it is best for our children to start learning Buddhism early in childhood. With little effort, children can truly and easily benefit from it. The experiences of a person with a pure mind are so different and profound that no ordinary person can truly appreciate them.

World Peace Can be Achieved if the Mind and Body are Well-trained, the Family is Well-run and the Country is Well-governed.

A true practitioner will keep himself from being greedy, angry, ignorant and arrogant toward others and his environment. If one has any of the elements just mentioned, then he is neither sincere nor proper. Sincerity and proper thoughts and viewpoints are the

basis for training the mind. A person with a pure mind and body will not become ill. We suffer from illnesses because our minds are filled with wandering thoughts and worries that are derived from greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance.

As mentioned earlier, sincerity and proper thoughts and viewpoints are the basis for purifying one's mind. A purified mind leads to a purified body and naturally, a person will become immune from illness; thus, a realized practitioner would never get seriously ill. Moreover, if a person is determined to follow the path of Buddha, he or she will not die in the conventional manner. A conventional death means a person does not know exactly when they will leave this world, nor where they will go afterwards. On the other hand, true practitioners with confidence in themselves and in Amitabha Buddha, who cultivate in accordance with Buddhist teachings, will be capable of controlling both the time of leaving this world and of being born in the Western Pure Land. This is neither unusual nor a fairy tale, but the simple truth, and can be achieved by cultivating the pure mind and vowing to reach the Western Pure Land. Therefore, one needs to understand how important it is to be free of worries and attachments. Every Buddhist should maintain a pure mind and

body at all times, treating everyone and everything with equality and composure. Only then would the family be in harmony, the society in unity and the world at peace. No longer would we have feuds, conflicts or wars. The peace and happiness, which we all wish for today, would no longer be a dream. World peace can be achieved if we combine Confucianism and Buddhism into our educational system.

The Eight Basic Confucian Moral Principles

Loyalty, filial piety, compassion, love, trustworthiness, responsibility, peace and equality are the eight basic Confucian moral principles and are represented by four Bodhisattvas in Buddhism. Di Tsang Wang (Earth Store /Kristigharba) Bodhisattva represents filial piety and therefore the Di Tsang Sutra is known as the Filial Piety Sutra. This is because it teaches filial respect for both parents and teachers, who are both equally important in Buddhism and Confucianism. To treat one's parents with filial piety and to respect teachers are the innate virtues of human nature. The goal of Buddhist teaching is for us to realize the true nature of the mind, which can only be achieved by discovering its virtuous nature, without which one will never become enlightened.

Guan Yin Bodhisattva symbolizes compassion and represents kindness and love. Wen Shu Shi Li (Manjusri) Bodhisattva symbolizes wisdom and represents faith and loyalty. Pu Xian (Universal Worthy/Samantabhadra) Bodhisattva symbolizes great vows and putting the Buddha's teaching into practice including filial piety, compassion and wisdom. He represents peace and equality. With compassion and wisdom, one can generate merits. To enjoy merits is to build upon the foundation of equality and purity - this is the greatest enjoyment for humankind. To cultivate merits in childhood, generate merits in middle age and enjoy merits in old age are described in Chinese as truth, virtue and beauty. One who enjoys merit in old age is called the complete person, which is similar to Buddha. We must understand that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are not gods but the most perfect and happiest beings for us to learn from.

Wise ancestors in China long evoked these principles long ago before Buddhism was introduced there. Buddha Shakyamuni, Confucius and Mencius never met, but they all had identical concepts and teaching methods. That was truly a coincidence and as is said in Chinese, "Heroes would have similar views" or said in the West, "Great minds think alike".

CHAPTER SIX
THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS ARE FOR EVERYONE

Recently a student came to me and asked how to practice Buddhism. The answer is the Four Universal Vows of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas:

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

To help others is to do our best in assisting them to break through delusion and become awakened, then they will be able to attain true happiness and leave suffering behind. In order to help all beings escape from suffering, one should be a good cultivator, excelling in moral and academic achievements. A cultivator can learn by upholding the precepts to guard against harmful consequences created by speech, body and mind, i.e. words, deeds and thoughts. Before comprehensive learning, however,

it is necessary to cultivate good virtue by ending our afflictions including greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance, as they are the sources of all desires and delusions. True wisdom arises from cultivation of high moral character, from a pure, non-discriminatory and compassionate mind, and not from knowledge gained from books. Without a pure mind, the knowledge gained leads to deviated views. Therefore, the first priority in practicing Buddhism is to purify our mind and cut off all attachments to erroneous ways. With the pure mind we can then reflect everything clearly and know all, thus attaining true wisdom and enlightenment.

Buddhism is for everyone, regardless of gender, age, occupation, nationality or religion. Everyone can learn and practice Buddhism, for it is the teaching of ultimate, perfect wisdom. There is a need for Buddha's teaching in all parts of the world. However, it is not easy to nurture Buddhist teachers. The difficulty lies with the fact that most people cannot renounce their worldly fame and wealth, which are the major obstacles in learning and practicing Buddhism. Without a pure mind, there is no way to truly understand Buddha's teachings and to realize the causes of all the problems in this world. Meanwhile, without virtue of merits and good causes and conditions,

practitioners cannot find good teachers. Therefore, I always encourage young practitioners to resolve to save our country and the world.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE KEY TO THE GREATEST TREASURE

Recently, we have established a Pure Land Learning Center in the United States. The goal is to introduce the traditional Chinese culture to Westerners and to help them practice Buddhism. Our ancestors invented the most precious and timeless vehicle: a classical Chinese language, called Wen-Yen-Wen, in order to transmit the ancient culture to future generations and us. With this powerful vehicle, we can read the publications of Confucius or Mencius that were written twenty-five hundred years ago. Because our ancestors realized that language would be changing from time to time, they used this classical Chinese language to pass on their wisdom, thoughts, skills and experiences. It is not difficult to learn Wen-Yen-Wen. Mr. Lee, my teacher, has taught us the secret to reading the classical language; one only has to recite fluently fifty chapters of ancient Chinese literature. In order to write in classical Chinese, one needs to memorize one hundred chapters. With this key, Wen-Yen-Wen, we can have access to and learn Buddhism and ancient Chinese wisdom, for the latest translations of the Buddhist sutras were in this classical language. Along with the

pure, non-discriminating and compassionate mind, we can thus unlock our ultimate wisdom.

I have encouraged practitioners to read the Infinite Life Sutra, which is written in a simpler form of this classical Chinese language. The public should easily understand Eighty percent of its content. There are only forty-eight chapters in this compilation of the Infinite Life Sutra, which is close to the amount that Mr. Lee required us to memorize. This is a good way to start learning this classical Chinese language. After reading and memorizing this sutra, I believe there will be no more obstacles in reading other Buddhist sutras. I strongly urge not only practitioners but also Westerners who want to learn the Chinese culture and Buddhism to memorize fifty chapters of Wen-Yen-Wen or the Infinite Life Sutra. With two or three years of effort, one can obtain the key to explore the wonders of ancient Chinese wisdom and at the same time, transform the Buddhist sutras into one's own private treasure. Without this key, having all these collections of sutras and ancient Chinese literature would be futile, for there is no entry into the treasury.

Elementary School is the Foundation of Happiness

Ladies and gentlemen, parents and students, elementary school is the foundation for happiness in human life, the root of the country's future and the caretaker of the future society. You have made such contributions to this greatest task in human life and society. It is most meaningful and valuable for society to nurture capable and virtuous youth. I would like to extend my gratitude and highest respect to you. I wish all of you inner peace and happiness. May everyone have great health and prosperity!

To
Understand
Buddhism

Venerable Master Chin Kung



"TO UNDERSTAND BUDDHISM"
EXCERPTS FROM THE TALK IN AUSTRALIA
JANUARY, 1996

CHAPTER ONE
A VIRTUOUS AND PERFECT EDUCATION

Today, we see an increasing number of people around the world starting to practice Buddhism. However, not many people truly understand what Buddhism is. Therefore, this becomes a very important topic. What exactly is Buddhism? We need to understand it clearly. Buddhism is a most virtuous and perfect education directed by the Buddha towards all sentient beings in the nine realms. How can we tell that Buddhism is an education? First, we can tell from the way we call Buddha Shakyamuni our "Original Teacher" that he is the founder of Buddhism and that we are his students. From this, it is very apparent that the Buddha and we share a teacher-student relationship. This is only found in education.

If Buddhism is his teaching, who then is the Buddha? Buddha is a Sanskrit word meaning wisdom and enlightenment. However, this wisdom is not the worldly wisdom we think of today. Broadly speaking, the Buddha's wisdom is the ability to ultimately, per-

fectly and correctly comprehend the true reality of life and the universe in the past, present and future. One who has perceived this wisdom is called a Buddha. Buddha Shakyamuni told us that all sentient beings, including ourselves, possess this innate wisdom and ability. Thus Buddhism regards all beings equally. Although we are equal in origin, presently we cannot see this because everyone's wisdom and abilities differ.

In our society, there are those who are intelligent and those who are not, those with great ability and those with less. How do these things come about? The Buddha told us that they are due to our varying degrees of delusion. Our innate wisdom and abilities are temporarily lost due to this delusion, but are not truly or permanently lost. If we can break through this delusion, then we will be able to recover these abilities. Therefore, the Buddha's teachings show us how to rid ourselves of delusion and to uncover our innate abilities.

It is often stated in Mahayana sutras that the Buddha did not directly help sentient beings. Then how do sentient beings become Buddhas? By themselves. The Buddha only assists from the side by explaining the true reality of how we delude ourselves. After realizing this, we diligently put his teachings into

practice to attain enlightenment of true reality. We then become Buddhas. Buddha Shakyamuni clearly explained that becoming a Buddha is attainable by all sentient beings.

From this, we can see that Buddhism is a teaching. However, a teacher can only educate us about the principles, tell us of his/her experiences in practice and attainment, and suggest various methods for our attainment. The rest ultimately depends upon us. We are the ones who need to be enthusiastic and diligent in order to attain achievement. Once we understand that Buddhism is an education, we will logically regard the Buddha as our teacher. From this, we understand that in proper Way Places, we do not regard the Buddha or Bodhisattva images as gods to be worshipped. We make offerings to these images for two reasons. First, to remember and repay our gratitude for this truly great education, which we have so fortunately encountered and accepted in this lifetime.

The opening verse to sutras says it very well; "It is extremely difficult to encounter this teaching in infinite eons." The debt of gratitude we owe the Buddha is similar to the remembrance, which some Chinese have toward their ancestors. We reflect on our origins for without these ancestors we would not exist.

The second reason we make offerings to the Buddha is to follow the examples of the virtuous. Buddha Shakyamuni was an ordinary person like us; yet, he was able to be awakened and become a Buddha. What is there to stop us from achieving this as well? Therefore, the pictures or statues of the Buddha serve to remind us every moment to advance diligently towards this goal. The images are not to be regarded as gods or objects of superstition.

In Buddhist Way Places, the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have many appearances. This has often led to the misconception that not only is Buddhism a religion but one that worships multi-deities as well. Indeed Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have many names. For example, in the Tripitaka there is the Ten Thousand-Buddha Names Sutra, which gives us over twelve thousand Buddha's names and even more names for Bodhisattvas. Why are there so many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas? Within our original-nature there exists infinite wisdom, virtuous and artistic abilities that cannot be completely represented by merely one name. It is similar to a highly accomplished person in a prominent position; his or her business card could have numerous titles.

The names of the Buddhas represent the complete, innate and virtuous abilities within our self-

nature. All the Bodhisattva names represent cultivation of different virtues. The original abilities within our self-nature are infinite, but temporarily lost. Without genuine cultivation, we will not be able to uncover any of them. All the Buddha and Bodhisattva names are none other than ourselves. Once we understand this, we will realize that a high level of artistry represents the styles of the Buddha's teachings. For example, sculptures and pictures can express the Dharma. Understanding the true meaning of these images will help us to gain the true benefits of the Buddha's teachings.

If Buddhism is not a religion, why is it not then a philosophy? In philosophy, there is both a subject and an object. In Mahayana Buddhism, there is no difference between subject and object; they are one. This meaning is very profound and difficult to understand. For example, a great master said, "Utilizing gold to form utensils, all utensils are of gold." Are the gold and the utensil the same thing or different? From their appearances they look like two different things. However, from their composition we realize that they are the same.

We need a profound intuitive comprehension to truly understand the reality of life and the universe. All of the Mahayana Sutras try to explain this con-

cept and truth. We will share the same viewpoints with the Buddha when we truly understand and clearly recognize this truth. Ordinary people, like we are deluded. In what way? Because we see everything in opposition to the other, not knowing that in reality everything is actually one and not two.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GOAL OF THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING

From the intrinsic nature of Buddhism, we proceed to the goal of the Buddha's teachings. This goal is to break through delusion and achieve enlightenment. The Buddha pointed out to us why we are leading lives of suffering and why the six realms of reincarnation exist. It is so, because the wisdom and virtuous abilities in our original nature have yet to be uncovered. Thus, all our viewpoints and ways of interacting with life and the universe are incorrect. The erroneous acts committed due to these incorrect viewpoints and ways have resulted in the suffering of reincarnation within the six realms.

The goal of the Buddha's teachings is to help and to guide us break through our delusion, to be awakened and to escape this suffering and obtain happiness. What do we seek in Buddhism? We seek Annuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi, the Perfect Complete Enlightenment. The Buddha teaches and hopes that all of us will attain this ultimate enlightenment, in other words, will become a Buddha.

The Perfect Complete Enlightenment can be explained as three levels: Arhats, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. The first is "*Proper Enlightenment.*" In our

world, there are some very intelligent and wise people, such as scientists, philosophers and religious leaders. They have reached higher realization than most people have. However, although they may have reached a certain level of realization, the Buddha would not recognize their knowledge as the proper enlightenment, because they have not severed their afflictions. They still dwell on the rights and wrongs of others, on greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance. They still harbor wandering, discriminatory thoughts and attachments. In other words, their minds are not pure. Without the pure mind, no matter how high the level of realization one reaches, it is still not the proper enlightenment.

In Buddhism, the standard for proper enlightenment is the pure mind from which wisdom arises. It is the wish of all Buddhas that we attain this proper enlightenment. This is the level or degree of an Arhat and is similar to attending a university to earn an undergraduate degree. Therefore, Arhat, Bodhisattva and Buddha are titles similar to degrees of enlightenment attained in Buddhism. Those who achieve proper enlightenment are called Arhats. Arhats do not have illusory or misleading thoughts and viewpoints. They do not dwell on the rights and wrongs of others, or on thoughts of greed, anger, ignorance or

arrogance.

From this, we can comprehend intuitively the difference between Buddhism and worldly education. From the Buddha, we learn the true teachings and proper enlightenment. Only with this proper enlightenment can we escape all sufferings to obtain true happiness. As human beings, we undergo the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. We do not attain what we seek, are parted with our loved ones and find ourselves in the presence of those whom we resent or even hate. We are surrounded by all these sufferings with no apparent way of being truly free. Only after learning Buddhism will we be able to reach genuine liberation.

The Flower Adornment Sutra explains to us, "All sentient beings possess the same wisdom and virtuous capabilities as the Buddha, but these qualities are unattainable due to wandering thoughts and attachments." This clearly explains the root cause of our problems. Practicing Buddhism is to accord with the teachings of the Buddha, to rid us of wandering, discriminating thoughts and attachments. Thus, we uncover our pure mind, in turn giving rise to true wisdom, which is proper enlightenment. Therefore, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas would not recognize the intelligent and worldly wisdom, as it lacks the pure

mind, the proper enlightenment. Upon attaining proper enlightenment, we have the ability to transcend the endless cycles of birth and death, not to mention the ability to solve everyday problems.

Whether talking about the Buddha's education or worldly education, it is essential to understand the concept of delving deeply into one method in order to attain achievement. This is especially so in Buddhism. One who truly wishes to learn effectively needs to follow only one teacher and practice only one path to ensure a smooth journey. When following two teachers with two different paths, we are bound to become confused as to which path to take. Even worse, following three teachers catches us at a T street. With four teachers, we are caught at a cross street. Today's young people like to learn a lot, but fail to attain a good result. The problem lies with being caught at those cross streets, confused as to which way to take. To succeed and attain achievement in practicing Buddhism, we need to follow just one teacher and concentrate on just one method.

What is this achievement? True achievement is attaining a pure mind. Upon achieving some degree of pure mind, we will have fewer afflictions and thus an increase in true wisdom, enabling us to solve

problems in this world and beyond. Without this true wisdom, there is no way to truly solve problems. Therefore, true wisdom is essential in leading a happy and fulfilling life. On a broader scale, it can help us to solve society's problems.

Today there are many intelligent politicians who thought they were very smart but have ended up bringing their countries to the brink of disaster, as well as putting their citizens through much misery. What is the reason for this? These leaders have not severed their afflictions, discriminating and wandering thoughts, and attachments. Consequently, their first consideration is their own benefit, their self-attachment.

The Buddha taught us to attain true wisdom by first breaking free of our own viewpoints. Without this wisdom, we could misinterpret the meanings within the Mahayana sutras. If we are able to part from the selfish mind, then true benefits will definitely be received. With proper enlightenment, only when we have no ego or self-attachment, will we be able to differentiate true from false, proper from deviated, right from wrong and beneficial from harmful. Without breaking through our own viewpoints, we will not have these abilities. From this, we understand there is a standard to the proper enlightenment.

One level above the proper enlightenment is the "*Equal and Proper Enlightenment.*" Equal means equal to the Buddha, but not yet having become a Buddha. This level is higher than that of an Arhat. The equal and proper enlightenment requires us to break through one degree of ignorance, to attain one degree of Dharma body. At this point, the way we view the reality of life and the universe is very close to that of the Buddhas. One who achieves the equal and proper enlightenment would be called a Bodhisattva.

The Flower Adornment Sutra explains the forty-one levels of Bodhisattvas, all of which have these levels of enlightenment. After breaking through the very last degree of ignorance, perfecting wisdom and enlightenment, one achieves the "*Perfect, Complete Enlightenment*" that is Buddhahood. Therefore, Buddha, Bodhisattva and Arhat are common titles, not a specific name for a specific person. They are titles similar to those of Doctorate, Master or Graduate degrees. For example, in the name Guan Yin Bodhisattva, Guan Yin represents great compassion and kindness. The title of Bodhisattva is similar to a Masters Degree. Presently, people have misconceptions about Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, thinking these names are specific beings. They do not under-

stand that these titles refer to any being who possesses those characteristics. Buddha or Bodhisattva, when added to a name is simply referring to a specialty.

From the intrinsic nature of Buddhism, we realize that our purpose of practice is to seek wisdom. In Zen, this goal is called, "In pursuit of clarity of mind to see into one's self-nature." In other words "Complete Enlightenment." In the Pure Land School, this is called "One Mind Undisturbed." The Pure Land School is unique in that not only do we seek to have One Mind Undisturbed but also seek birth into the Western Pure Land. This is unlike other schools, which rely on one's own strength of cultivation in seeking solely one goal. The Pure Land method has two goals that can be achieved in one lifetime.

One who is very familiar with the Infinite Life Sutra and understood its teachings would be free of doubt. The full title of this sutra reveals the goals of our practice: The Buddha Speaks of the Infinite Life Sutra of Adornment, Purity, Equality and Enlightenment of the Mahayana School. Infinite life and adornment are what Pure Land practitioners seek. *Infinite life* refers to the merits and virtues of one's perfect self-nature. *Adornment* refers to perfect complete wisdom with great ease and fulfillment.

Purity, equality and enlightenment are the methods, the three ways of practice. Upon attaining any one, all three are attained. Of all the schools of Buddhism, none surpass these three ways of practice.

The Zen School uses the awakening path to reach the great enlightenment and attain the clarity to see into one's true nature. Buddhist schools other than Zen stress the practice of understanding or proper viewpoints, until reaching great complete understanding. The Pure Land School, on the other hand, concentrates on the pure mind. A person with purity of mind will naturally be non-discriminating and awakened. An awakened person will naturally have a pure and non-discriminating mind. The route chosen may be different but all reach the same goal. In Zen practice it is expressed as "obtaining clarity of mind and seeing into one's true nature."

Different schools may use different names but the results or the level of the state of mind are the same. Therefore, to criticize any other schools would be to slander both the Buddha and the Dharma. All these methods were passed down to us from Buddha Shakyamuni. Choosing any path will enable us to attain achievement. How can we say that one method is better than another? From all these different methods we just need to know how to choose

the one method that is most suitable for us and our level.

First, if the level of the method we chose were beyond us, making it difficult to practice, we would not succeed easily with that method. Second, it needs to be suitable and convenient for our manner of living. Third, it needs to be compatible with modern society, because we cannot separate ourselves from society or other human beings. Therefore, we need to consider these factors when choosing our method of cultivation.

However, no matter which method one practices, it is essential to be rid of self-viewpoint and attachment in order to obtain the benefits from practice. Or else, like so many have experienced, the great efforts put into the practice will have been in vain. Some practitioners have felt that even after years of practice they have achieved virtually nothing, even to the point of feeling that they were better off before they practiced. It seemed as if the more they practiced, the worse they felt. All this comes from having chosen a method that was unsuitable for them. This is similar to choosing an unsuitable major in school. When we choose a major that is not suited to our foundation and ability, we have an extremely difficult time trying to succeed. Choosing

the right major makes studying much easier, so we will have a much better chance of success. The same thing goes for practicing Buddhism. If we do not know our own capacity, we can test ourselves.

Like myself, for example. After reading many Mahayana sutras, I thought myself incapable of any achievement. I wanted very much to sever my wandering, discriminating thoughts and attachments, but was unable to. Finally, I chose the Pure Land method to attain achievement. It does not require one to be completely rid of but rather to suppress these hindrances. As long as we are able to suppress all afflictions, we can still be born into the Western Pure Land carrying over our existing karma.

This method suits me very well and thus is how I chose it. Previously, I had tried Zen, the Teaching Schools, the Esoteric School and the practice of following the precepts, but could not reach achievement with them. Thus, I came back to the Pure Land method and wholeheartedly delved deeply into the Buddha Name Chanting Method while concentrating solely on lecturing on the Pure Land sutras. These are my experiences from decades of practice.

CHAPTER THREE

SYMBOLISM AND THE ARTS

After we understand clearly the goal of the Buddha's teachings, we will view the sutras differently. These sutras are one of the world's largest literary collections. I believe that when considering the range of all academia, none of them surpass Buddhism. To obtain the benefits from this vast collection, it is necessary for us to know and understand the essence of its content, which is the true reality of all Dharma, the true reality of life and the universe. Life refers to ourselves. Universe refers to the living environment that surrounds us. It would be incorrect to treat Buddhism as an abstract and obscure learning that had nothing to do with our daily lives. Every word in the sutra closely relates to our daily living. Furthermore, it is definitely not superstition.

How and where do we start? For convenience, the perfection in the methods of the Buddha's teaching uses a high level of creativity. Buddhism of two thousand years ago had already taken an artistic path. For example, all the Buddha's names and sculptures represent our virtuous nature, innate qualities of wisdom, virtuous abilities and artistic talents. All of the Bodhisattva's names and forms represent

our cultivation of virtue. They instruct us how to apply the teachings in our daily lives to bring out our virtuous nature so we may receive Buddhism's benefits.

In Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, four great Bodhisattvas represent our order of practice and level of achievement. The first is Earth Store Bodhisattva. Whether we are thinking of worldly teachings, the dharma or Buddhism; nothing can be accomplished without the earth or a place of existence. The existence of humans cannot be separated from our great earth as we rely upon it for survival. Whether for food, clothing, living or working, all rely on the production of the land, thus the infinite treasures that the great earth encompasses are seemingly endless for us to use. The word "earth" in the name Earth Store Bodhisattva represents the mind and the word "store" means treasure.

The Buddha's teachings guide us to first start the practice from our mind, as our true nature encompasses the infinite wisdom and virtuous abilities that are no different from those of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas. However, today it seems as if we have lost our innate wisdom and virtuous abilities. The Buddha told us that all these qualities are not truly lost, just not yet uncovered. In the present moment, we endlessly immerse ourselves in wandering, discriminating

thoughts and attachments, which have resulted in this temporary loss of abilities. However, inside the true mind, no wandering thoughts exist. If a mind has wandering thoughts then that mind is a false one. We originally possessed this true mind, so practicing Buddhism is simply recovering it. Therefore, our first goal in practice is to uncover and look for the treasure in our mind. In other words, the Buddha's teachings do not seek from the outside but rather they seek from within our self-nature.

Earth Store Bodhisattva represents filial piety; thus, the Earth Store Sutra is about filial piety, a basic concept that everyone would do well to start from. The kindness that our parents have shown by giving us life and nurturing us is beyond description. To be filial and take care of our parents is naturally our basic responsibility. Not only do we need to take care of their material needs but of their spiritual life as well. Moreover, we need to nurture their aspirations for us and for us, this is the hardest of all. Parents wish their children to have successful careers, behave well, and to be respected by current and future generations. In other words, we would do well to act in a manner, which will make them proud of us. Therefore, the ultimate and perfect achievement of filial piety is to become Buddha. We begin our practice

from here and expand our filial piety and respect to include all sentient beings.

The second Bodhisattva, Guan Yin, represents the cultivation of great compassion and kindness. What is the meaning of making offerings to Guan Yin Bodhisattva? It is to remind us that we would do well to treat all people with great compassion and kindness, to use unconditional love and care to help all sentient beings.

The third Bodhisattva, Manjusri, represents wisdom and rationale, reminding us that when we practice and interact with others we need to fulfill our filial duty, to rely upon wisdom and rationale, not on emotion. The fourth Bodhisattva, the Great Samantabhadra (Universal Worthy) represents carrying out the cultivation truthfully, applying filial piety, compassion, kindness and rationale in our daily lives. When we perfectly achieve the way of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, we become a Buddha. Buddhism teaches us how to live in harmony with the true reality of life and the universe. In other words, we would live perfect and wonderful lives similar to those of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This is the true, ultimate and perfect Mahayana teaching.

To practice Buddhism, we start by:

- 1) Being filial and respectful toward parents, teachers and elders,
- 2) Having the great compassionate mind,
- 3) Nurturing our thinking and wisdom and
- 4) Broadening our mind.

Although in sequence, they also can be practiced simultaneously, as each encompasses the others. For example, being filial to parents includes compassion and kindness, reasoning and wisdom. Wisdom includes being filial, compassionate and kind.

Once we have a general understanding of Buddhism, how do we apply it to our daily living? First we need to know what each Buddha and Bodhisattva represents. If we do not, then Buddhism would be reduced to superstition and we would not receive its true benefits. All Buddhist sutras contain these qualities, characteristics and the ways of practice; therefore, learning only one sutra will be enough. We need to know how to understand and apply the teachings effectively.

Usually in the center of the main hall of a temple, there are statues of one Buddha and two Bodhisattvas, which represent our self-nature and original entity. The two Bodhisattvas represent our virtuous

abilities within our self-nature; one is understanding and the other is practice. If the Buddha in the middle is Buddha Shakyamuni, then the two figures on either side of him will be Manjusri and Universal Worthy Bodhisattvas, representing wisdom and application respectively. Thus, understanding and practice are combined into one. If the hall has the three sages of Western Pure Land, with Buddha Amitabha in the middle, representing self-nature, then the two figures on either side of him will be Guan Yin and Great Strength Bodhisattvas. They respectively represent compassion and wisdom, completely symbolizing the infinite wisdom and virtuous capabilities. Therefore, we again see that Buddhism is a teaching.

There are profound teachings within the names of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, for example the name of Buddha Shakyamuni tells us the principles of the Buddha's education. "Shakya" means humanity and kindness. "Muni" means purity of mind. The teachings of these two qualities are advocated because people in our world lack compassion and kindness, and are often selfish. Moreover, all sentient beings lack purity of mind, constantly dwelling in wandering thoughts, greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance. Any Bodhisattva who becomes a Buddha in this world will be named Shakyamuni to teach

us the remedy for our problems. Once the representations of Buddha and Bodhisattva statues are understood intuitively just by looking at them, we will perfectly comprehend the goal of the Buddha's teachings.

When we enter the first hall of a way place, the Hall of Heavenly Guardians, we will see the statue of Maitreya Bodhisattva surrounded by the four Heavenly Guardians in the middle of the hall. Maitreya Bodhisattva, known in the west as the Happy Buddha, has a huge smile representing joyfulness. His great stomach represents enormous tolerance and broad-mindedness, teaching us to interact with others and matters with joy, to be non-discriminating and tolerant. Next to him are four Heavenly Guardians or Dharma Protectors who teach us how to protect ourselves.

The Eastern Dharma Protector, symbolizes fulfilling our duty and responsibility, teaching us that regardless of position, we need to fulfill our duties. He is holding a lute in his hand. The strings of the instrument should not be too tight, or else they will break; nor should they be too loose or they will not play well. When properly adjusted and balanced, the instrument will play beautifully, clearly symbolizing that we need to take the middle path when interacting with

matters, people and objects. When each of us fulfills our responsibilities and obligations, how could the nation not prosper?

The Southern Dharma Protector symbolizes improvement and daily advancement. Not only do matters need to be taken care of appropriately; continuous improvement also needs to be sought. In his right hand, the Southern Dharma Protector holds the sword of wisdom and in his left hand a ring symbolizing the perfection of wisdom, showing us that we need to use wisdom in seeking improvement. The sword symbolizes how we need to sever afflictions before they are out of control.

The third and fourth Heavenly Guardians are the Western and the Northern Dharma Protectors, representing comprehensive vision and listening respectively. Both teach us to observe and listen more carefully as well as to read numerous books and travel to many places for comprehensive learning. They teach us to do well in our job, to adopt the good qualities as well as to disregard the shortcomings of others.

The Western Dharma Protector represents far-sighted observation and holds a dragon or snake. The dragon or snake symbolizes constant change. In his other hand he holds a bead, symbolizing princi-

ples. People, matters and objects in society undergo changes constantly. We need to observe very carefully and thoroughly, to have a firm grasp on the principles within in order to be able to control this "dragon or snake." The Northern Dharma Protector holds an umbrella to prevent us from being contaminated. This reminds us that within a complex society, we need to know how to protect our body and mind from pollution and corruption. From these examples, we can see that the artistic aspects of the Buddha's education are truly beautiful. Unfortunately, many people regard these Dharma protectors as gods to be worshipped, which is totally wrong.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FIVE GUIDELINES OF PRACTICE

The Three Conditions

After establishing Pure Land Learning Centers in several countries, we set five guidelines for Pure Land practitioners to follow. These five guidelines were extracted from the five Pure Land sutras to be applied in daily living. The first guideline is the Three Conditions, extracted from the Visualization Sutra, which provides a very important foundation for cultivation. The Buddha stated in the sutra that these Three Conditions are the proper causes of which all the Buddhas from the past, present and future practice their pure karma. In other words, all the people who became Buddhas perfected these as their foundation; thus, we cannot disregard them.

The First Condition concerns the good fortune of heavenly beings and humans. Before we can become a Buddha or a Bodhisattva, we need to first become a good person. The criteria for this are:

- 1) Being filial toward parents,
- 2) Being respectful towards elders and teachers,
- 3) Being compassionate and not killing any liv-

ing being and

4) Practicing the Ten Good Conducts.

With this first step, we begin to practice Buddhism. The Second Condition includes:

5) Taking the Three Refuges,

6) Abiding by laws, customs and precepts, and

7) Conducting oneself in proper and dignified manner.

The main principle of our practice is awakening, proper thoughts and viewpoints, and purity. A beginning step in learning Buddhism is to Take Refuge in the Triple Jewels. After we generate the heart to Take Refuge in the Triple Jewels by accepting, learning and practicing Buddhism, we request a Dharma Master to pass on the principle, goal and direction of practicing Buddhism. The Triple Jewels are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. In appearance, they are pictures or sculptures of Buddhas, Buddhist sutras, and monks and nuns, respectively. Another way of understanding them is that they are the true Triple Jewels within our true mind.

The Buddha taught us to take refuge in the Triple

Jewels of our self-nature. To return and rely upon the Buddha is to rely on the awakening in our self-nature. What is this awakening? Currently, we are deluded and not awakened. How did we become deluded? Delusion is due to our discriminating mind and attachments. If we part from this discriminating mind and attachments, can we still see objects clearly? We cannot say we do not see them, but if we see them very clearly without discriminating thoughts and attachments, then we are awakened. When there is the slightest discrimination or attachment, one is deluded.

The same applies to our attaching to the form we are looking at; it is delusion. Initially, objects do not have names but are given them by people. The names, like the object, are not real. Apart from the names and appearances, what we see is the true form. We are deluded about these forms, their physical features and their names. Consequently, when we rid ourselves of these delusions, we will not be attached. This is how we can train ourselves to return and rely upon the Buddha Jewel or Enlightenment.

If someone points to a table and asks what it is, we will naturally say it is a table because that is what everybody calls it. We go along with everybody's

attachment but if we are not attached to it ourselves, then we will be awakened. Therefore, the minds of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are pure and without the slightest pollution for they are completely without these attachments. When with others, we can go along with them but maintain our purity inside. In this way, we return and rely upon awakening. After taking refuge, when we apply this concept to our daily living, whether interacting with people, matters or objects, we will no longer be deluded. Our mind will always be pure, non-discriminating and able to help all sentient beings. This is to return and rely upon awakening or the Buddha Jewel.

The Dharma that we return to and rely upon refers to proper thoughts and viewpoints, which is hard to accomplish. Only when we are truly enlightened, will our thoughts and viewpoints be correct. Before we reach enlightenment, we can adopt the proper thoughts and viewpoints of Buddha Shakyamuni as ours. All the thoughts and viewpoints within the sutras are correct. We can at first rely on Buddha Shakyamuni, but only for a while, as he does not want us to rely upon him forever. This is like a student relying on teachers in school but becoming independent after graduation. Likewise, before we attain great enlightenment, we need to rely on Bud-

dha Shakyamuni and Buddha Amitabha as our teachers.

Where is the Buddha? The Buddha is within the sutras, as Buddha Shakyamuni stated in the Infinite Sutra and Buddha Amitabha relayed to us through the Forty-eight Great Vows. Relying on the teachings within the sutra is relying on the Buddha. We would do well to practice earnestly what the Buddha taught us to do or refrain from doing. In this way we will be true and good students. Applying this concept in our daily living is to return and rely upon the Dharma Jewel.

The Sangha of the Sangha Jewel represents purity and harmony as in the Six Principles of Harmony. Consequently, whenever we see a monk and nun, we do not want to dwell on whether this person is a great cultivator or a violator of precepts. Whether they are or are not is not our concern. Seeing a monk or a nun reminds us to see whether we ourselves have lived by the Six Principles of Harmony, or have cultivated purity of mind. To truly take refuge is to know how to reflect on ourselves, since we still have all the same bad habits and are committing the same offenses, having been deluded for infinite eons.

It would be helpful for Buddhists to set up the Tri-

ple Jewels in their home. When we make offerings to the Buddha statue or picture, we will be reminded that we need to be awakened. How? When our six senses encounter the external environment, we would not discriminate or attach, or give rise to any thoughts. For example, meditation is not giving rise to any discriminating thoughts or attachments. Thus one achieves a high level of wisdom and is able to see all situations clearly. However, ordinary people like us, use the false mind and constantly give rise to wandering and discriminating thoughts and attachments in these situations. The appearance of everything we see is false. Once we have understood these principles and learned how to not have wandering thoughts and attachments, we can also become a Bodhisattva or Buddha.

Taking the Three Refuges is a beginning step in practicing Buddhism. From there, we proceed on to the foundation of Theravada Buddhism then to Mahayana Buddhism for the Third Condition, which is comprised of:

- 8) Generating the Bodhi mind,
- 9) Deeply believing in the Law of Cause and Effect,
- 10) Reciting and upholding Mahayana sutras

and

11) Encouraging others on the path to Enlightenment.

Before practicing Mahayana Buddhism, we need to generate the Bodhi mind. Bodhi means awakening, thus, the Bodhi mind is an awakened mind. How will we be awakened? When we first realize and understand that this world is full of sufferings.

Upon careful and rational observation of society, we may find our conclusions frightening. Looking back over the last thirty years, we see that people used to be kinder and more considerate. Whereas, people nowadays are more selfish and usually only think of benefiting oneself at the expense of others. This selfishness has created a chaotic world making even the climate abnormal. Therefore, the first thing in generating the Bodhi mind is to realize that this world is filled with sufferings and that the Western Pure Land is filled with bliss. True awakening is when we seek to escape these sufferings then to attain happiness.

Second, awakening is the aspiration to benefit and help all sentient beings, to think of others and not of oneself. What are the urgent needs of sen-

tient beings? There is nothing more important than the Buddha's teachings. Thus, our most pressing need is nurturing and training lecturers to continue to pass on Buddhism. Today due to our advanced printing skills, numerous sutras have been distributed throughout the world, but regretfully, few people lecture on them. Since people have the tendency to misunderstand the meanings within the sutras, we need qualified people to lecture on and explain them. Today the best way to benefit others is to train lecturers and at the same time gain innumerable merits. We work toward this goal with a great tolerant mind, not just for one Way Place, area or country but for the whole world. If only one country prospers and the others are poor, the poor will envy and resent the prosperous, leading to conflicts or worse. How could we pass the days peacefully knowing this? If everyone is prosperous, then all will be happy and peaceful.

Once there is a good number of lecturers to help others clearly understand the principles of the Buddha's teachings, they will in turn gradually help others in reaching awakening to break through delusion and escape suffering thus attaining happiness. This is the most beneficial way for us to put the Bodhi mind into practice.

To believe deeply in the Law of Cause and Effect does not simply refer to "What goes around comes around." The profound meaning is, "Being mindful of Buddha Amitabha is the cause and becoming Buddha is the consequence."

For the Pure Land practitioner, reciting and upholding Mahayana Sutras can be accomplished by reciting the Infinite Life Sutra. Delving deeply into one method can be achieved by concentrating on one sutra. If we do not think this is sufficient, the four other sutras and one commentary of the Pure Land School could also be recited. These six are more than enough. Simply allow them to take root and flourish. Finally, we encourage others on the path to enlightenment. The first three parts of the Third Condition benefit the self. The last one teaches us to dedicate the benefits we have received to all others; to help them to understand, practice and succeed in their cultivation of Buddhism. When attaining achievement in the Buddha's teachings, we succeed in attaining infinite wisdom.

The Six Harmonies

The Three Conditions are the first of The Five Guidelines of the foundation for Pure Land practice.

We have yet to become Buddhas or to depart from this world. Even when we becomes a Buddha, we do not leave all behind as Buddhas want to help all sentient beings in the ten directions.

How does we get along with others harmoniously? The Buddha set six principles for us to follow. Not only are these applicable within a Buddhist community but also in all organizations or groups. When we take refuge in the Triple Jewels, there is a saying, "To return and rely upon the Sangha, the most worthy of respect of all groups." Group means a gathering of people. In our society, the smallest group of people is a family, a larger one is a nation and the largest is the union of many nations. Actually, the whole world is a group of which we all are a part. Why is a Buddhist community the most precious of all groups? The six rules that the Buddha set for Buddhist communities are something all its members follow, making this group the most worthy of respect and of being a role model for all.

The first of the Six Principles of Harmony is to share the same goals and viewpoints, in other words to establish a common consensus. Everyone within this group shares similar thoughts and viewpoints, providing the foundation for living in harmony. If everyone has different viewpoints and ideas, then conflicts

would be unavoidable, making the group discordant. Therefore, sharing the same goals and viewpoints is very important, making this the first of the Six Principles.

The second of the Principles is to observe the same precepts and rules. There are both broad and narrow meanings within the word "Precept." The narrow meaning includes upholding the five or ten layperson precepts, monk's or nun's precepts, or Bodhisattva precepts and the Buddha's teachings. In a broader sense, "Observing precepts" includes abiding by etiquette, customs, rules and laws of the entire world.

Today, through the advancement of technology in travel and communication, our sphere of activity is not limited to our country but expands to other countries as well. Whether sightseeing, on business, or visiting others, it is essential to observe the local customs and laws, to live in harmony, thus being welcomed and respected by others. This principle is practical and brings joy to others; therefore, upholding Buddhist precepts also includes following the customs and laws of the country. All governments welcome law-abiding citizens, so to truly promote and be a benefactor of Buddhism is to uphold the precepts. With this as a base, people could then harmoniously

live without arguments and share the joy of practicing together. When living together and sharing a common consensus, a group would naturally not have any conflicts. To practice with the same goal and to achieve improvement daily would ensure that the community would experience joy and inner peace.

The last of the Six Principles is to share benefits harmoniously. Benefits refer to our daily necessities. A Sangha does not merely represent a community of monks and nuns. At home, the family can also practice Buddhism and accord with the Six Principles of Harmony to make up a sangha. Even within a company, everyone, from the employer to the workers, can practice Buddhism to make up a sangha. Therefore, sangha has a very broad meaning. Within a Sangha, we strive to share benefits. For left-home people it means having the same manner of living, from the abbot to one with no formal responsibilities within the community, everyone shares the same manner of living, with no special treatment.

We would do well to live by the Six Principles of Harmony to learn how to better get along with others. When with other organizations or groups, regardless of whether or not they follow the Six Principles of Harmony, we ourselves need to accord with

the spirit of these Principles to truly follow the Buddha's teachings.

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are our best role models while we are to be good role models for others who are not Buddhists. This is the spirit of Buddhism, using our own behavior to influence and benefit others, thus promoting Buddhism. We do not teach others in the formal sense but simply let them observe us. Thus our daily conduct and practice can unobtrusively and imperceptibly help to influence and change others like Buddhas or Bodhisattvas manifesting in this world to teach sentient beings.

The Three Learnings

The third guideline is the Three Learnings: discipline, concentration and wisdom. The Three Learnings summarize all the teachings from Buddha Shakyamuni and all the Buddhas in the past, present and future. The Great Canon of Sutras is divided into three sections: sutras, vinaya or precepts, and sastras or commentaries. Sutras include the teachings of meditation, vinaya includes the teachings of discipline or precepts, sastra includes the teachings of wisdom. These Three Learnings of discipline, concen-

tration and meditation represent the core of the Buddha's teachings.

The teachings of precepts place most emphasis on rules, regulations and laws. The earth has four seasonal changes: spring, summer, autumn and winter. We need rules and laws to successfully interact with people and matters, thus enabling the members of society to enjoy a wonderful and fulfilling life. A world absent of law and order is a world of chaos. Although we may possess good fortune and wealth, we may still be unhappy, living in fear and insecurity. Why? We have discarded law and order. The precepts thoroughly explain the principles, methods and the level of mind we need to bring about law and order. The Three Learnings clearly explain this concept. We practice the Buddha's teachings in order to attain the ultimate, perfect wisdom. Once we uncover this inner wisdom, we will know the true reality of life and the universe, including how to restore our original abilities.

The Buddha told us that all sentient beings possess a Buddha's wisdom and virtuous abilities. While the knowledge of the past, present and future is part of our original ability, they are unfortunately covered and hidden by our delusion. Delusion occurs when the mind/heart is not still, while an enlightened one

remains unaffected. When our six senses encounter the environment, our mind/heart moves, giving rise to wandering thoughts.

The Buddha taught numerous ways to practice so we can remain unaffected in all situations, not giving rise to any wandering, discriminating thoughts or attachments, thus recovering our original capabilities. This state of mind is deep concentration. Cultivation is correcting our erroneous thoughts, speech and behavior. What are the standards for these? They are discipline and concentration. Discipline is the external standard and precept observation is the internal standard; concentration is the standard for the pure mind. The external standard is very important, but much more important is the internal standard, because it helps us to achieve our goal in the practice to attain wisdom.

With discipline, we attain the concentration that gives rise to wisdom. This ultimate, perfect wisdom is called "Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi." How do we first attain proper realization, then equal and proper realization, and finally perfect, complete realization? These levels of attainment depend on the strength of concentration, the extent of the purity of mind. As Buddhists, the goal of our practice is Perfect, Complete Enlightenment. If we depart from rules of order

and purity of mind, we are not practicing Buddhism. No matter which method we practice, whether Buddha Name Chanting, precept observation, mantra recitation, or Zen meditation; if we do not follow the guidelines, we cannot attain the pure mind. All would be just window dressing. With one degree of pure mind, we attain one degree of wisdom. With two degrees of pure mind, we attain two degrees of wisdom, etc. Therefore, practicing accordingly and maintaining and protecting the pure mind, which gives rise to true wisdom, is exceptionally important.

The Six Paramitas or Principles

The fourth guideline is the Six Principles or Paramitas that are the primary living principles of Bodhisattvas. Each principle encompasses our whole way of living; for example, the first of the Six Principles is "Giving." Some people think of giving as simply donating money. Actually, this is only one of the infinite kinds of giving. From the appearance, giving is sacrificing oneself to give to others. However, from its intrinsic nature, giving is letting go.

We can practice giving of our wealth or physical strength. For example, a homemaker keeps house daily providing a comfortable environment for the

family. Without proper understanding, this homemaker may feel these daily chores are repetitive; that washing clothes and cooking meals are boring. If however, the homemaker clearly understands that he or she is cultivating the Bodhisattva Way by practicing the Six Principles, then he or she will be filled with joy. Changing one's perception of doing the same chores with a giving, non-attaching heart is practicing the principle of giving. Not only does one serve the whole family by keeping the house neat, but one also serves as a role model for all relatives and neighbors. In this way, not just one but all beings benefit. One is thus a family role model for all families. Whether managing a store or business, being a role model for others is practicing the Bodhisattva Way in guiding sentient beings. The principle of giving can be expanded to the infinite universe and beyond. With this extensive broadmindedness, one is a Mahayana Bodhisattva.

Giving is comprised of three categories: wealth, teaching and fearlessness. The giving of wealth includes internal and external wealth. Internal wealth involves all of our mental and physical labors that benefit others. External wealth is the giving of all other things, e.g. money, food, etc. Gaining wealth is the result of giving wealth. The giving of teaching is

the willingness to instruct others while not selfishly holding back any knowledge. It is to do our best in educating willing students. As a result, we gain intelligence and wisdom. The giving of fearlessness includes soothing away other's fears and providing a feeling of security. As a result, we gain health and long life. Most people wish for wealth, intelligence, wisdom, health and long life. When there is a good cause, a good reward will follow. We do not receive a reward without first planting the good cause. By practicing all three kinds of giving, we perfectly attain all these rewards.

Observing carefully, we will see that there are not many who have all they wish for. Some wealthy employers do not possess great intelligence or wisdom, but have intelligent and wise employees working under them, following their instructions. These intelligent and wise employees have cultivated wisdom in their past lives but did not cultivate good fortune. On the other hand, these employers cultivated good fortune but did not cultivate wisdom. Cause and effect may be complex, but not hard to distinguish. Thus, using Buddhist principles to observe society enables us to know how to conduct ourselves in the future.

In reality, true wisdom is more important than

good fortune. Wealth is good fortune, but how we use and allocate wealth requires a high level of wisdom. Without wisdom, possessing wealth may lead us to create infinite bad karma from bad deeds, thinking we are doing good. Without wisdom, we are unable to distinguish true from false, proper from deviated, right from wrong or beneficial from harmful. Often we are ignorant of having conducted ourselves in an erroneous manner.

All these principles are explained very clearly in Liao Fan's Four Lessons. Within good and bad there exists true and false, half and full, right and wrong. From its appearance, what may appear to be a true good deed, due to changes in its nature some time later, can turn out to have been a bad one. On the other hand, what may initially appear to be a bad deed can turn out to have been a good one. Therefore, we need insight to understand the outcome of all good and bad deeds and not to judge them by their initial appearance. We need a high level of wisdom to understand deeply and to be far-sighted enough to distinguish correctly the truth.

The second principle is "Precept Observation," which also has a broad meaning. We follow the Buddha's teachings, accords with the customs of society, and abide by the rules and laws of a coun-

try. In both the spirit of the law as well as the letter, all rules and laws need to be followed.

The third principle is "Patience." Patience includes long-term patience whether interacting with people, matters or objects. As the Buddha explained in the Diamond Sutra, all dharma is attained from patience and endurance. To succeed in either worldly or spiritual dharma, we must have patience. Without it we cannot attain achievement. Having this patience to endure what others cannot, we achieve what others cannot. Only then will we accomplish great deeds.

The fourth principle is "Diligence." Diligence is seeking focused improvement daily, not trying to advance in many different directions. Advancing with diligence to a certain level, we attain concentration. This concentration does not simply mean cultivating while sitting in a lotus position facing a wall. It is to have a firm hold of our mind and not to be influenced by external conditions. This accords with the Diamond Sutra, to remain unmoved by and unattached to any phenomenon. Not attaching to any phenomenon is to not be enticed by temptations from external influences. We achieve concentration when we are unmoved by all phenomena, such as the advancement of scientific technology, so con-

fusing yet dazzling to our eyes. It is seeing everything clearly and knowing that all is intuitive wisdom, the prajna wisdom. In this way, we will then live happily.

For example, when we buy a refrigerator, use and maintain it nicely, it can last at least ten years. During these ten years, there will be improvements and changes in refrigerator manufacturing. Will we want to exchange it for a new one? When there is no need for a new one and we continue to use it, we have concentration. When we are moved upon seeing a new model in the store and want to buy it to replace the old one, afraid that guests will laugh at the latter's appearance; we have neither concentration nor wisdom. Living in this way, we would not be happy because our income would slip through our fingers just trying to keep up with new products. Buddhism calls this Mara, what comes to make us suffer, in this case, to tempt us to spend all our hard-earned money. A truly wise person would be unmoved and live a happy fulfilling life without worries or afflictions, unlike ordinary people.

*The Ten Great Vows of
Universal Worthy Bodhisattva*

The fifth and last of the guidelines is the Ten

Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva. Universal Worthy Bodhisattva is unlike any other Bodhisattva due to his great broadmindedness, where his every thought is of helping all sentient beings. He does not think of himself, his family, country or world but of the infinite universe and beyond, reaching true perfection. With this great broad mind, all that he practices is great.

The order in practicing Buddhism is belief, understanding, practice and attainment. First, we need to have unwavering belief, for without it we are unable to accept the Buddha's teachings. It is not that easy to instill this belief, as it depends on affinity or condition. In Buddhism, these conditions include good roots, good fortune, merits, virtues and cause. Without these, it would be extremely difficult to have this unwavering belief. In believing, we need to first believe that we possess the Buddha nature and that we can definitely become a Buddha. Second, we need to have confidence in our original teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, knowing that he would not lie to us. We also need to believe that what the great masters and Patriarchs have passed down to us is truthful. However, simply believing is not enough.

Equally important is that we seek the correct and perfect understanding. After understanding, we

need to accomplish, to practice, to apply Buddhist principles, methods and levels of attainment into our daily living. Lastly, the attainment is to prove within our daily lives that all the teachings and understandings are correct.

Lately, I have heard some fellow practitioners mention that lacking a blessing from an Esoteric Master would seem to make us inferior to others. In reality, are these kinds of blessing all that effective? In America, many fellow practitioners were so enthusiastic about this ritual that they would even drive ten hours or more just to find a Master to obtain a consecration. After they came back, I asked them if they had uncovered their wisdom and had fewer afflictions. They honestly shook their heads and said no. I said, if a consecration is achieved by sprinkling a few drops of water on the head, then we might as well go take a shower to receive a great consecration.

Not understanding the true characteristics and meanings behind all the rituals reveals a very sad phenomenon in Buddhism. Mr. Nian-Chu Huang who was an Esoteric master, stated very clearly in his commentary of the Infinite Life Sutra, "The consecration is a blessing of compassion and kindness; one's head symbolizes the act of instilling in the person the

outstanding teachings of the Buddha."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PURE LAND SCHOOL

Today, as we practice the Pure Land method, we know that the Infinite Life Sutra is a very important sutra, thus is a supreme Dharma. Passing on the Infinite Life Sutra and the Amitabha Sutra to others brings them a great consecration. Reciting the sutra once is to receive consecration once from all the Buddhas in the ten directions. Reciting the sutra twice is to receive consecration twice from all the Buddhas. Therefore, we need to understand the method in practicing, to start from the foundation of the Three Conditions.

As I said earlier, the first condition is to be filial and respectful toward parents and teachers; to be compassionate and not kill any living being; and to cultivate the Ten Good Conducts. Cultivation begins from here. If we think that we cannot accomplish the above, then no matter how we practice, it is only superficial. It is important for us to practice earnestly to accomplish these conditions or we may not attain the true benefits from the Buddha's teachings.

Ultimately, we return to the Pure Land method. Why? To return to the Pure Land method is what all Buddhas recommend we do. In the Amitabha Sutra,

all the Buddhas in the six directions praise the Pure Land. In the Infinite Life Sutra, Buddha Shakyamuni was very clear in praising Buddha Amitabha as the most respected, with the brightest of light, the king of all Buddhas. When returning to and relying upon a Buddha, who would be better than the best? Buddha Shakyamuni did not ask us to return and rely upon himself but rather upon Buddha Amitabha, for he is the ultimate Buddha of all Buddhas.

In the Flower Adornment Sutra, we see that both Manjusri and Universal Worthy Bodhisattvas sought birth into the Western Pure Land. If the Western Pure Land were not so remarkable, why would these two Bodhisattvas of the Hwa Dzan world want to go to this particular Pure Land? The Infinite Life Sutra explains why we would want to chant Buddha Amitabha's name and be born into the Pure Land. If we would recite the Infinite Life Sutra more often and listen to lectures on it, we would come to a deeper and more meaningful understanding and cultivation.

If we do not wish to spend more time and energy to seek the truth of life and the universe, then following the teachings within this sutra would be sufficient and perfect. Why? In the future, after we are born into the Pure Land, our wisdom, virtuous abilities and enjoyments will be equal to those of Buddha Ami-

tabha. We will then clearly understand the truth of life and the universe. Thus, as ancient wise people often said, the Pure Land method is a short cut to the ultimate Enlightenment.

Using other methods, we take a long circuitous route to achieve Enlightenment. Seeking birth into the Pure Land is the short cut that ensures us of attaining Enlightenment in one lifetime. From this, we know that this method is outstanding and beyond comparison. All Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and past Patriarchs have praised this method. It is a rare opportunity for us to encounter it in this lifetime. As is said in the opening verse of the sutras, "Difficult to encounter in infinite eons." Having encountered it in this lifetime, it would be unbearably sad to let this rarest of opportunities pass us by. It occurs so infrequently in infinite eons, we need to hold on tight, to not let go, to learn and practice as earnestly and sincerely as we can.

As this is a Dhamma text,
we request that it be treated with respect.
If you are finished with it,
please pass it on to others or
offer it to a monastery, school or public library.
Thanks for your co-operation.

Namo Amitabha!



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Printed in Taiwan