

# RIGHTVIEW QUARTERLY

DHARMA IN PRACTICE  
FALL 2007

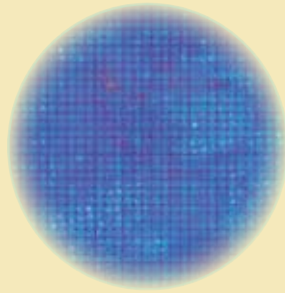
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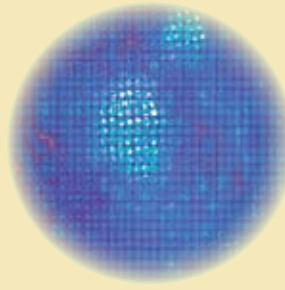
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## **ABOUT THE COVER:**

This Japanese handscroll from the mid-12th century records in opulent gold calligraphy the text of the Heart Sutra. The scroll originally came from a large set of the Buddhist scriptural canon, probably numbering more than 5,000 scrolls, that were dedicated to Chuson-ji Temple in present-day Iwate Prefecture. Chuson-ji was founded in 1105 and the Northern Fujiwara warriors lavishly patronized the temple until their demise at the end of that century. Copyright, The British Museum, published with permission.

# Present View

Editor Xianyang Carl Jerome explains here that reconciliation is our practice, and addresses this idea again in the context of Buddhist social engagement in the article *Those Pictures* on page 24.



Xianyang Carl Jerome's first teacher was Zen Master and Beat Poet Zenshin Philip Whalen in San Francisco. For the past six years, Carl has been a student of Master Ji Ru at the Mid-America Buddhist Association (MABA) and the International Buddhism Friendship Association (IBFA) in Chicago. In 2006 Master Ji Ru granted him Lay Teaching Endorsement and Carl continues to teach Buddhism classes and lead retreats. He is the editor of Rightview Quarterly magazine and editor and founding teacher of Rightview Online.org.

**T**he more we look at questions of social engagement for articles in Rightview Quarterly and for teachings at Rightview Online, the more I keep coming back to the Buddhist idea of reconciliation, which is more an implicit than an explicit teaching. Ultimately I have begun to think that Buddhism can be viewed simply as the path of reconciliation. This can be seen both on the macro and micro levels, in terms of world events and in terms of our moment-to-moment everyday lives.

I have grown to understand that reconciliation is always possible, if we are just able to suffer life's perceived injustices without hostility arising in us. We see this in the example of the Dalai Lama who has been able to reconcile his differences with the Chinese government. His remarkable practice, in the bleakest of situations, is inspiring, and a model for all of us.

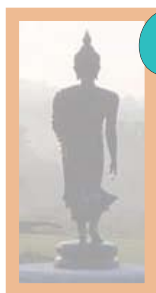
On a micro level, every moment is a chance to reconcile our differences with the universe. From this perspective, the Buddhadharma is the path to reconciling our "self" and its everyday understanding of the world with the ultimate reality of how things are. Viewing each moment as a chance for reconciliation means every moment is a moment of engagement. The practice question, then, is "How do we engage?" and reconciliation is the skillful means. From this perspective, the aim of Buddhism is to allow us to understand and practice reconciliation and to give us the necessary tools in support of that practice

so that we can unite with the here and now in tranquility. ***And nirvana is the result of our full reconciliation with ultimate reality as impermanent, contingent, and without fixed identity.***

In my personal practice I use "mantras" and catch phrases as tools to keep myself on track. When I notice that I'm overreacting in some way, I find myself leaning on two particular phrases, repeating them over and over, contemplating them and allowing them to penetrate my consciousness as deeply as possible. The phrases are: **"This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am"** from **SN 22.59**, the Buddha's second discourse; and **"This is just a perceived injustice"** from Bodhidharma's ***Outline of Practice***. These teachings have gotten me through some tough decisions and some rough times. When they are not enough, though, I use the ultimate tool in the Buddhist repertoire: I go to my teacher for guidance.

The neat thing about practicing with reconciliation is that it is self-perpetuating. The more I practice with it, the more conditions arise for further reconciliation (develop and maintain); the more I practice with it, the less likely it is for conditions to arise that allow greed, anger, and delusion to propagate (abandon and restrain). That's one of the key scriptural formulas for practice: ***develop and maintain*** that which is beneficial, ***abandon and restrain*** that which is not.

It is another understanding of the pure precepts: stop doing evil, do only good, work solely for the benefit of others. And that makes reconciliation another right view.



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## Stay Tuned



**Tuning our practice, as Reverend Zuiko Redding explains here, is a moment-to-moment endeavor.**

*The wind is chilly* and the window above my desk is open. The cats, San Bon and Ananda, like it that way. For them, open windows provide better bird watching, perhaps because they can smell and hear through the screen. Soon I won't be able to accommodate them. The leaves on the new burr oak are falling. Days are shorter. Autumn is certainly here.

With fall's arrival, I long to get up later and sit less and not worry about being aware as I go through the day. After all, dealing with the cold and the dark takes a lot of energy. Is it this way with you, too?



One of the sutras in the Pali Canon (AN 6.5) tells the story of Sona, who also was having trouble with practice. Leaving his family to follow the Buddha, Sona made really intense efforts to get rid of his egoistic thoughts. Although he practiced intensely, his judgments and ideas stayed with him. He got pretty discouraged. Here he was, wandering the forest in a robe made of used cloth patches, sleeping under a tree, eating whatever he was given, sitting until his rear hurt, doing walking meditation until his feet bled, and he was getting nowhere. Maybe he should go home, he thought, give up the monk's life. His family would be jubilant at his return. He could enjoy all the comforts of a wealthy son and still gain merit by serving the monks.

Seeing Sona's concerns, the Buddha went to him and asked about his troubles. The Buddha said, "Before, when you were a householder, you were skilled at playing the vina (an ancient musical instrument, like a sitar), weren't you?"

"Yes, lord," Sona answered.

"And what do you think? When the strings of your vina were too taut, did it play well?"

“No, lord.”

“And what do you think? When the strings of your vina were too loose, did it play well?”

“No, lord.” “And what do you think? When the strings of your vina were neither too taut nor too loose, but tuned to be right on pitch, did it play well?”

“Yes, lord.”

It's the same with human beings, the Buddha suggested. If our effort is too much we want to give up and if it's too slack we become lazy. If we constantly tune our effort according to our capability and our changing conditions, then we can maintain it.

Whether we are householders or ordained people, it's the same. Sometimes we decide to make a huge effort—maybe to sit at least an hour daily, or to sit at least twice a week at a Zen Center. After a few days of juggling zazen, family, work and such, we become tired and dispirited. We quit in defeat. These kinds of efforts are the products of our concepts and our desires to be a “good person” or to get some reward like “enlightenment,” so they're difficult to maintain.

Or we may say to ourselves, like Sona, that family life and helping Zen Center is enough. It's OK not to sit—I have so many commitments. I'll drop awareness—I'm too busy to worry about being awake in the midst of all my activity. I'll do all that later. Soon, ego takes over and we are again enslaved by thoughts and desires.

What to do? Let go of ideas like “hard practice,” or “good practice,” or even “practice” and negotiate practice moment by moment. In other words, we tune our practice in each moment so that it harmonizes with our life.

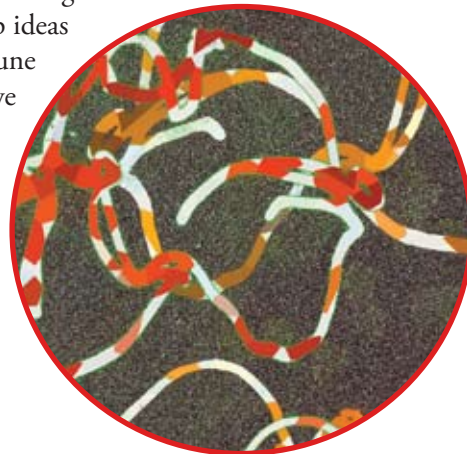
Like tuning an instrument, tuning our practice is beyond ideas and notions.

Tuning an instrument is a matter of making a small adjustment, listening, then making another small adjustment.

When each string sounds the proper note, we stop. It's the same in daily life. We make an adjustment, listen to our lives, make another adjustment. We know we're doing OK when the sound of our lives is harmonious. We are neither too taut in our practice nor too loose.

Of course, as conditions change, strings become tighter or looser and we have to tune them again. In daily life it's the same—circumstances change, harmony drifts off and we have to adjust again.

Tuning means that in each moment we make an effort to be present beyond our concepts of “too much” and “not enough.” Being in tune also means giving up ideas about rewards—being in tune is just being in tune. As we do this, our lives balance themselves. When we do zazen we do zazen, when we are not doing zazen we are awake—we're here with whatever is in front of us.



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**Reverend Zuiko Redding** is the Resident Teacher of Cedar Rapids Zen Center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She grew up in Texas where she encountered Zen as a university student, later practicing in Milwaukee with Rev. Tozen Akiyama and in Minneapolis with Dainin Katagiri Roshi. In 1992 she was ordained in Japan by Rev. Tsugen Narasaki, practicing under his direction at Zuioji Monastery and its mountain training center, Shogoji, where she received teaching transmission in 1996. She is a member of the American Zen Teachers' Association and one of Righview Online's guiding teachers.



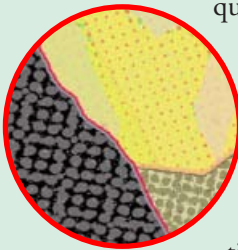
# A Tribute



**Master Ji Ru,**  
Abbot of the Mid-  
America Buddhist  
Association, remembers his  
first mentor in America, **Master Min,**  
the elder monk whose life and deeds  
as much as his  
words, were  
dharma teachings.



**A**ccepting the position of Abbot at the Great Enlightenment Temple of New York in 1993 was a turning point in my life. It was the Elder Venerable Master Min who encouraged me: "Take the position; it is the right thing to do." At the same time, Dr. C.T. Shen, Treasurer of the Buddhist Association of the United States (BAUS) also urged me: "The Elder is usually quiet and says very little, therefore, Venerable, please heed his suggestion." I was young and enthusiastic at the time; I took up the heavy and duty-bound responsibility without hesitation. Master Min then made the necessary arrangements for me to become the Abbot. From then on, like a tight knot, I worked inseparably for two years with the people at BAUS and did my utmost to establish a teaching and practice environment at the Temple.



I am very grateful to Venerable Master Min who provided me with guidance and support. Although we both lived in New York City, we resided at different temples. They were not very far apart, but our karma did not allow us much time together. As the Scripture says: "Because of karma, all beings are actually separated afar even though they live together." Much as I would have liked to have spent more time with him, I accepted the fact that I had to focus on my duties at Enlightenment Temple just as he had to focus on his responsibilities at his temple. But I treasure the time we did have together.

Although the Master Min has passed away, his wisdom is with me. I remain inspired by his courageous attitude toward life. He constantly strived for self-improvement, even as he became very old and approached death. In everything he did he practiced the dharma. I heard him say more than once: "Don't think that I'm old, I am actually not!" indicating the unwavering diligence of a senior monk.

Master Min was a good counselor. Whenever I passed by New York's Chinatown, I would go pay respect to him at his temple there. He was open-minded and candid, and this viewpoint was clear. He always listened to me calmly and patiently, occasionally pointing out my mistakes. His example motivated me to strengthen my spiritual practice.

I remember one time when we had a conversation about Chinese Buddhism. I told him that I felt helpless because there was so little I could do to bridge the disparity between an ideal implementation of Buddhadharma practice and the misconceptions that arise when people actually practice. He encouraged me and said: "The problems that exist in Buddhism today have existed for ages! It takes time to make changes: be at ease and do it gradually." Based on his experience, the Elder believed in blending and integrating ideals and practicalities. When we talked about Buddhism, Master Min maintained the passion of a Chinese Mahayana monk: he was confident that the Dharma would last for a long time and so would the practice of purification of our minds and actions.

As a devoted student of Venerable Master Tai Xu (the early twentieth century monk who revitalized Chinese Buddhism), Master Min admired his teacher's ability to penetrate the dharma, his teacher's open, embracing and accepting personality and his teacher's courage. Master Min saw himself as an introvert who had little merit. At times, he would humbly admit that he was a failure and would praise another student of Master Tai Xu, Master Yin Shun. He said that, even with his weak physical body, Master Yin Shun had developed a strong mind profoundly concentrated on Buddhist study and research, and that Master Yin Shun had published a great many Buddhist books that would influence and benefit people around the world for generations. Master Min also said that Master Yin Shun's contributions to Buddhism were enormous. Such comments showed that the Elder Venerable Master Min was pragmatic as well as wise.

After two years of service at BAUS, I resigned as abbot of the Great Enlightenment Temple. I left New York for my internship at Xiamen Traditional Chinese Medicine College in China. Just before leaving I went to pay my respects to Master Min. He said to me, "You are so energetic; I am like the setting sun at dusk with not much time left...what I can do now is no longer worldly." His physical body was deteriorating. I noticed that with death approaching, Master Min devoted more time to practicing *detachment* than earlier in his life. Phrases like "You earn what you worked for" and "We should be clear of our own boundaries" were frequently on his lips.

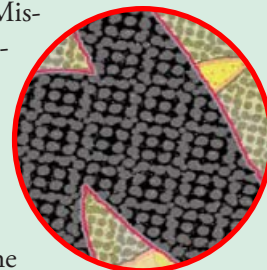
When teaching causality and karma, Buddha said:

*...what one has done by body,  
Or by speech or mind:  
This is what is truly one's own,  
This one takes when one goes;  
This is what follows one along  
Like a shadow that never departs.  
(Samyutta Nikaya 3.2)*

All beings live in the grip of karma. Our actions determine the kind of fruit that will arise for us. When the fruits ripen, there is no one else to bear the consequences but we ourselves. This is the Buddhist theory of the "Rebirth in the Three Periods: Past, Present and Future."

In the *Culakammavibhanga Sutra*, Buddha gave a discourse to Subha, a Brahmin student: "Beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions; they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is action that establishes beings as inferior and superior" (*Majjhima Nikaya* 135). Master Min practiced profoundly with this understanding, and his example left it indelibly planted in my consciousness.

When I returned to the United States from Xiamen, I joined the Mid-America Buddhist Association (MABA) in St. Louis, Missouri, and started traveling and teaching Dharma in the Midwest.



On November 26th, 1996, the Elder was diagnosed with lung cancer. I went to Boston to visit him and stayed with him for three days. The first morning, I woke up at five o'clock and had a talk with him. I asked him not to desert us, and to kindly stay with us a little longer. He replied politely: "The vine cannot rise again!" "It is real only if you say it's real; it is unreal only if you say it's unreal." Evidently, he had started observing his body's deterioration, and he did so calmly and with equanimity. I stayed in the guest room next to him and saw him six times in the next two days. Then, at 2 p.m. on November 29th, I excused myself and went back to St. Louis. Right after that I went to give a Dharma talk to the Buddhist study group at the University of Minnesota. It was at the St. Louis airport on December 31st, after the Minnesota trip, that I received news of the Elder's passing.

In contrast to the attachments and complications of a worldly life, the monastic life is simple and detached. Nonetheless, as a young monk at the time, the loss of such a close and virtuous Elder made me feel lonely and powerless. In memory of the Elder, I attribute to the Venerable Master Min the same phrase he used to describe his teacher Master Tai Xu: "Courageous, uncompromising, and fearless when facing others."

*With deepest gratitude to the Elder  
Venerable Master Min,  
I embrace the Triple Gem.*



# Buddhist Monasticism

*Then and Now, There and Here*

An examination of Buddhist  
monasticism's journey  
to the West by  
**Bhikshuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo**

A thorough discussion of the transmission of Buddhist monasticism and its adaptation in Western cultures would take volumes. Moreover, this historical process is still in its initial stages and is so multifaceted that any conclusions drawn at this point would be premature. Here I shall simply explore a few of the issues involved. Some of the points I raise may be controversial, but both critical and comparative analyses are essential to an understanding of the momentous meeting of cultures presently underway. Moreover, the spirit of free inquiry is wholly compatible with Buddhist thinking.

The sangha, the order of Buddhist renunciants, began near Varanasi with five young men from respected Brahmin families who became monks not long after the Buddha achieved enlightenment and started teaching. Gradually they were joined by thousands of other *bhikshus* (fully ordained monks) and a few years later by hundreds of *bhikshunis* (fully ordained nuns) as well. The early sangha was disproportionately upper caste, with its members from the better-educated classes of Indian society.

The Buddhist order was not the first in India. Jain and Brahmanical communities, which served as prototypes for the early sangha, were already established. Surviving documents revealing how daily life was regulated in these communities offer evidence that the early Buddhist mendicants adopted some organizational features from them. For example, followers of contemporary religious groups gathered together periodically, so the early sangha also began to gather on new moon and full moon days. At first they sat silently, but followers of other sects criticized them for sitting “like dumb pigs,” so the Buddha instructed them to read the Pratimoksa Sutra containing their precepts on these occasions. This tradition of the *bhikshu* sangha reciting the Bhikshu Pratimoksa Sutra and the *bhikshuni* sangha reciting the Bhikshuni Pratimoksa Sutra is one of the three essential rites of the monastic community. The other two are the rite commencing the rainy season retreat (*varsā*) and the rite concluding it (*pravaraṇa*). Other rites developed to help regulate the life of the sangha, including precise instructions for conducting ordinations and methods for resolving disputes. (1)

In the beginning the *bhikshus* lived an itinerant lifestyle, staying at the foot of trees and going to villages and towns to gather their daily meal in an alms bowl and to give dharma teachings. Although they were dependent upon the lay followers for alms, the optimal condition for achieving liberation was said to be staying in seclusion in the forest, aloof from society. As the sangha grew, the Buddha sent the *bhikshus* out to disseminate the teachings far and wide saying, “Let not two go in the same direction.” This instruction helped prevent the formation of strong bonds of attachment to places or people. Gradually the *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis* began to assemble in seasonal settlements (*vihāra*) for three months during the rainy season to avoid stepping on the insects that abounded during that time. Eventually these *viḥāras* became more or less fixed residences, developing into separate communities for the *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*. These single-sex communities included *sramaneras* (male novices) and *sramanerikas* (female novices) who were training to receive the full precepts. The Buddhists may have been the first renunciants in India to establish organized monastic communities, many of which evolved into



educational centers. (2) Relieved of household responsibilities and attachments, the monks and nuns were able to concentrate single-pointedly on living a disciplined life and achieving the goal of liberation.

## THE PURPOSE AND PRACTICE OF THE PRECEPTS

The Sanskrit word for becoming a Buddhist renunciant is *pabbajjīya* meaning “going forth.” It signifies leaving the household life and entering a state of homelessness. After becoming a renunciant, a person is expected to train for ten years (or at least a minimum of five) under the close guidance of a qualified senior *bhikshu* or *bhikshuni* preceptor.(3) After some years of such training, one might enter the second stage of ordination, receiving the *upasampada* or ordination as a *bhikshu* or *bhikshuni*, signifying full admission into the *sangha*, or monastic order.

The *Vinaya*, the corpus of advice and incidents related to monastic discipline, was not originally formulated as a separate body of texts, but was an integral part of the dharma teachings. When the order began, no set code of regulations for Buddhist mendicants existed. The regulations, or precepts, were established as needed beginning with the rule of *brahmacarya* (“pure conduct,” meaning celibacy) after one of the early monks returned home and slept with his wife.(4) Gradually over two hundred precepts were formulated on the basis of the misconduct of the *bhikshus* and about one hundred more on that of the *bhikshunis*.(5)

That the *bhikshunis* have roughly one hundred precepts more than the *bhikshus* has been interpreted by some as evidence that women have more delusions than men and by some as evidence of sexism in Buddhism. Examined historically, however, neither interpretation is justified. Instead, it appears that as the *bhikshuni sangha* evolved, the nuns inherited most of the precepts formulated for the *bhikshu sangha*, and additional precepts were formulated as incidents arose involving nuns, particularly a nun named Thullananda and her followers. Some of these

latter precepts, such as the ones prohibiting nuns from traveling alone, clearly are designed to protect them from danger and exploitation. Other precepts, such as the one requiring *bhikshunis* to receive instructions from a *bhikshu* twice a month (but not vice versa), clearly reflect gender inequalities in Indian society at that time.

The *Pratimoksa* texts contain the specific injunctions by which Buddhist monks and nuns live, the precepts that help them regulate their lives.(6) These injunctions are an integral part of Buddhist ethics as a whole, helping practitioners create a conducive physical and psychological environment for spiritual practice. They help them, for example, to ensure the smooth functioning of the Buddhist monastic community and to protect the *sangha* from the criticism of the lay community.

The *Vinaya* texts establish a baseline for acceptable conduct for Buddhist monastics and provide a framework within which *sangha* members may make informed judgments on how best to conduct their lives and nurture their practice of virtue.

The purpose of the Buddhist monastic code is to establish optimal conditions for the achievement of liberation. Observing the precepts helps

beings control the passions that entangle them in *samsara* and fosters the awareness needed to precipitate liberation. Many times in the texts the Buddha says, “Come, o monk, live the *brahmacarya* life in order that you may put an end to suffering.” The *Pratimoksa* texts emphasize the practice of virtuous actions and the forswearing of negative actions in order to progress toward liberation from cyclic existence.

Sangha members make a voluntary, usually lifelong, commitment to maintain certain precepts and standards of behavior; it is important to consider this commitment seriously before making it. The most fundamental requirements are to refrain from sexual conduct; taking

**"The purpose  
of the  
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of  
liberation."**



life; taking what is not given; telling untruths; taking intoxicants; attending entertainment; using ornaments, cosmetics, and perfumes; using luxurious seats and beds; taking food at unregulated times, and handling silver and gold. In addition, many other precepts help monastics remain mindful of every action in daily life. To take the precepts lightly, saying “This precept is not that important,” or “This precept is impossible to keep,” violates the precept that prohibits belittling the precepts. To the casual observer, many of the secondary precepts appear trivial and irrelevant to spiritual pursuit; even to the dedicated practitioner their abundance can be discouraging. Harkening back to the classic clerical debate over the letter versus the spirit

evoking mixed reactions of curiosity, admiration, or disdain from friends and passersby, but they are also a powerful incentive for mindful awareness. Wearing robes entails an obligation of honesty with regard to one’s moral conduct: it is a declaration that one is observing the precepts of a Buddhist monastic, so to wear them without keeping the precepts is dishonest. *Sangha* members are traditionally regarded as worthy of trust, respect, and offerings. To acquire these benefits undeservedly by misrepresenting oneself is a serious matter. The dangers implicit in according all members of the Buddhist community the status of *sangha*, whether they are abiding by precepts or not, should be abundantly clear. These days many Westerners commonly refer to all members

On a personal level, a tension exists between the desire for solitude and the desire to be of immediate service to living beings “in the world.”

of the rule, one may also argue that adhering to technical correctness rather than embodying the spirit of the precepts is counterproductive to the achievement of liberation.

Of course, it is difficult to keep all the precepts purely. Differences in social conditions now and at the time of the Buddha require thoughtful adaptation of the precepts in the present day. Making wise decisions in adapting the precepts requires a thorough study of the precedents, described in the *Vinaya* texts, upon which the precepts were formulated.<sup>(7)</sup> In addition, years of training under careful guidance are required to learn how to appropriately handle everyday situations, especially in the West. Monastics often fall short of their own expectations and occasionally commit infractions of the precepts—walking on the grass, handling silver or gold, digging the ground, and so on—but a clear understanding of the *Vinaya* injunctions provides criteria for making decisions and serves as a foundation for building a solid practice.

The patched robes and shaved head, the most obvious signs of a Buddhist’s monastic commitment, may be inconvenient sometimes,

of dharma centers as *sangha*, though this is not the traditional usage of the term. Although it is possible for lay people to be exemplars of ethical conduct, those who have made a commitment to strict monastic discipline have traditionally been regarded as a field of merit.

Although the monastic code can and needs to be interpreted within the context of culture, place, and time, the *Vinaya* texts are part of the Buddhist canon and cannot simply be revised at will. The various Buddhist monastic cultures observed in the world today—Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Tibetan, and so on—are the results of a synthesis of *Vinaya* and the local norms and customs of the countries where Buddhism spread. One of the most striking features of the world’s various Buddhist cultures is the common legacy of monastic discipline—the robes, the mores, the spiritual ideals—that each of these preserves in its own unique way.

As we may recall, it was the sight of a renunciant who appeared peaceful and contented that inspired Buddha Shakyamuni’s renunciation of worldly life. The image of this renunciant made a striking impression on the young prince, who

had been shocked by his recent encounters with sickness, old age, and death, and his resultant realization that these sufferings are intrinsic to the human condition. To inspire others to develop renunciation and take up the spiritual path, then, is one of the roles that a monastic plays. This is a huge responsibility.

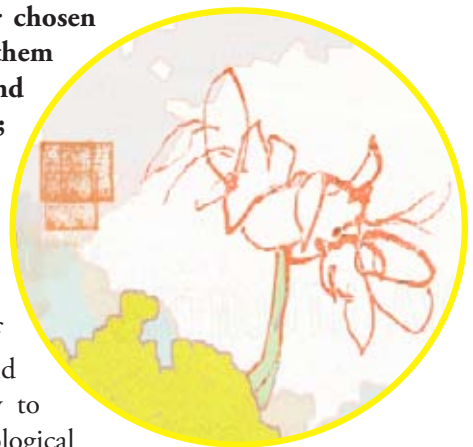
***Nuns and monks cannot become genuine models of simplicity and contentment unless we live simple and contented lives.*** If we are caught up in consumerism, greed, and attachment—wanting more comfort, more possessions, better possessions—then we are spinning on the wheel of desire like everyone else and do not represent an alternative lifestyle for others. It comes down to this question: If nuns and monks live, act, and talk like worldly people, are we really fulfilling the socially beneficial role that is expected of a monastic? In an age when the clergy of various religions in many countries are coming under scrutiny for lavish indulgences and moral transgressions, Western nuns and monks have the opportunity to help revitalize Buddhism by reaffirming the original purity and simplicity of spiritual life.

## PARADOXES IN MONASTIC LIFE

In the beginning the Buddha exhorted the *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis* to “wander solitary as a rhinoceros.” As time went on and the number of nuns and monks grew, the Buddhist sangha was criticized for roaming around and trampling crops, so gradually many gave up their eremitic lifestyle and settled in cenobitic communities. In a sense, then, Buddhist monasticism represents a rejection of social expectations yet, whether as mendicants or settled contemplatives, nuns and monks are trained to be very conscious of social expectations. The apparent tension here reveals the push and shove in monastic life between self-oriented personal practice and other-oriented community life—the contrast between liberation from the constraints of the world on one hand and concern for community and society on the other. It mirrors a larger dichotomy between the mystical ideal of the absolutely unconditioned and the mundane, reflected in the strict observance of precise, practical rules. Such contrasts illustrate the paradoxes implicit in Buddhist monastic life.

On a personal level, a tension exists between the desire for solitude and the desire to be of immediate service to living beings “in the world.” Perhaps influenced by their Judeo-Christian cultural background, most Western monastics become ordained with the intention, at least in part, of helping people and contributing to the betterment of society. Because Buddhism is new to the West, many opportunities arise for social service—establishing centers, teaching, leading retreats, serving teachers, translating, counseling newcomers, running a Buddhist center, and responding to requests from the wider community. However, these activities—important as they are—clearly leave little time for personal practice. We begin to feel guilty taking time away from the multifaceted needs of the Buddhist community for individual study and meditation. Yet, without a strong personal practice, we lack the inner resources to adequately serve the community’s needs. Ironically, developing the inner spiritual qualities needed to benefit sentient beings requires thorough study and reflection, which requires periodic withdrawal from the very beings we wish to serve.

Another paradox in monastic life concerns the range of images and expectations that a nun or monk confronts when living in the West. The lay community has high expectations of monastics and sometimes expects them to be saints. On the other hand they want them to be “human,” with all the human frailties, so that they can “identify with them.” **Unrealistic expectations of saintliness can make monastics feel totally inadequate to their chosen task, often pushing them beyond their physical and emotional limitations; whereas the expectation that they exhibit human frailties can cause lapses in discipline.** Monastics are expected to be at once reclusive—masters of meditation and ritual—and social—responding selflessly to the emotional and psychological needs of all who petition them. These contrasting expectations ignore the fact that individuals come to monastic life with a range of personalities, inclinations, and capabilities.



For each one to be all things to all people is impossible, however hard we may try. This creates an inner tension between what they expect themselves to embody spiritually and what they realistically could have achieved at this point. Trying to use this tension between spiritual ideals and psychological realities creatively, for spiritual progress, is one of the greatest challenges for a practitioner, lay or ordained. The process of skillfully negotiating the ideal and the ordinary,

They may serve without compensation as teachers, translators, secretaries, cooks, and psychological counselors in the Dharma center and also work at an outside job in order to pay for their own rent, food, and personal expenses. They are expected to play the role of a nun or monk and do much more, without the benefits traditionally accorded a monastic.

The wide spectrum of choices that Western monastics make concerning

more comfortable discussing personal matters with nuns, rather than monks, and were able to receive closer personal guidance by training under them. Even though *bhikshus* confirm *bhikshuni* ordinations, as stipulated in the *Vinaya* texts, the tradition of nuns receiving ordination and training from nuns has continued in many monasteries until today, particularly in China and Korea. In countries such as Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Tibet, however, the ordination of nuns has been conducted

**"Women need to address straightforwardly issues of autonomy and leadership, cutting dependencies on male authority, instilling a sense of self-reliance, and fostering independent communities."**

pride and discouragement, discipline and repose, requires a raw personal honesty that only relentless spiritual practice can engender. Another paradox concerns the material well-being of Western nuns and monks. The original mendicant lifestyle practiced in India is difficult to replicate in contemporary Western countries. Although ethnic Buddhist communities generally care for the material needs of monastics in the temples of their particular traditions, Western monastics find few places outside Asia where they can live a monastic lifestyle. Thus, Western nuns and monks are often monastics without a monastery. Nuns and monks living at Gampo Abbey in Nova Scotia and Amaravati in England are the exceptions. Other ordained Western Buddhists find that issues of livelihood—food, shelter, and medical expenses, for example—require a great deal of energy that could otherwise be directed to spiritual practice.

The general public, including Western Buddhists themselves, often assumes that Buddhist monastics are cared for by an order, as are Christian monastics, and are surprised to learn that newly-ordained Western nuns and monks may be left to deal with issues of sustenance completely on their own.

issues of livelihood was evident at the 1996 Bodhgaya training course, *Life as a Western Buddhist Nun*. At one end of the spectrum were two nuns from Amaravati who had not touched money for sixteen years; at the other end was a nun who supported herself as a registered nurse, wore lay clothes and longish hair for her job, and had a mortgage on her apartment and taxes to pay. Because adequate monastic communities have yet to be developed, most ordained Westerners face the pressures of playing both the role of a monastic and that of an ordinary citizen. They must deal with the incongruity between the ideal mendicant lifestyle from the time of the Buddha and the modern ideal of economic self-sufficiency. **Resolving the paradox between the ideal of renunciation and the realities of survival is one of the great challenges faced by Western Buddhist monastics.**

### CREATING MONASTIC COMMUNITIES FOR WOMEN

At the time of the Buddha nuns received their "going forth" (*pabbajiya*) and training under the guidance of nuns. Although monks in the early days were assumed to have greater knowledge and authority, nuns felt

almost exclusively by *bhikshus*. In a way, this makes sense, since these *bhikshu* precept masters are well respected and experienced in performing these ceremonies. On the other hand, it means that monks have the power to decide who joins the nuns' order without consulting the nuns. This creates a problem. The *bhikshus* ordain women, but they often do not provide them with food, accommodations, or training. Previously ordained nuns have no choice but to accept these novices, even if they are not at all suited to monastic life.

Monasteries for nuns must figure out some way to feed and house the newcomers or are put in the awkward position of having to refuse them admission to their monasteries. There have also been cases where *bhikshus* have ordained women who are physically unwell, psychologically or emotionally unstable, or retarded. Although it is contrary to the *Vinaya* to ordain unfit people, once they are ordained, the situation becomes very difficult. Senior nuns and their monasteries are liable to be criticized if they are not able to care for these new nuns.

Now I would like to bluntly raise the issue of women's reliance on men and recommend that women develop



monastic communities independently. Of course nuns are deeply indebted and deeply grateful for all the support, encouragement, and teachings we have received from excellent male teachers and I am not suggesting that we sever or diminish these important relationships in any way. Instead, I am suggesting that women, and nuns in particular, need to assume, with wisdom and skillful means, a greater sense of responsibility for their own future. They need to address straightforwardly issues of autonomy and leadership, cutting dependencies on male authority, instilling a sense of self-reliance, and fostering independent communities.

Many women both in Asian and Western societies are male-identified. This is natural in patriarchal societies, where men are valued over women. Male-identified women respect men, ask and accept advice from men, work for men, support men materially, look to men for approval, and provide men with food, lodging, all necessities, and often luxuries, even when they do not have enough themselves. This is not a new phenomenon. During the Buddha's time an elderly nun was found to have passed out from lack of food, because she had given the food in her alms bowl to a monk. When the Buddha heard about this he prohibited monks from accepting alms that had been collected by nuns.

**It is important to question honestly whether the tendency to identify with males is appropriate for nuns.**

In leaving household life, nuns reject the traditional role of subordination to a husband or male partner. They renounce the role of a sex object available for men's enjoyment and enter a community of women where they can be free of men's authority. Therefore, it seems a bit strange if nuns, having achieved a state of freedom and independence, then choose to rely constantly on men. Men have their

own concerns and responsibilities. No matter how compassionate they are, monks cannot be expected to take full responsibility for nuns' communities. Nuns need to develop self-reliance and self-confidence and begin to take full responsibility for their own communities. At present, due to a scarcity of qualified female teachers, that is, Tripitaka masters, nuns have no choice but to rely on male teachers in developing study programs. But I suggest that women adopt the goal of nurturing and developing themselves as fully qualified teachers and spiritual masters capable of guiding not only other women, but society at large.

Excellent models of autonomous monastic communities for women exist today in Taiwan and Korea. In the past few years these communities have inspired education and meditation training programs for women in locations as widespread as Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the Indian Himalayas. Autonomous monastic communities for men have been a staple of Asian life for centuries. Now, with the acculturation of Buddhism in the West, we have the opportunity to focus attention on developing autonomous monastic communities for women that are equally valued. Buddhist women teachers in both Asia and the West are demonstrating that spiritual leadership is not only a possibility for women, but is already an everyday reality.

## ENDNOTES

- (1) An extensive discussion of the procedures used for resolving disputes is found in Sunanda Putuwar's *The Buddhist Sangha: Paradigm of the Ideal Human Society* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), p.69-90.
- (2) A detailed examination of sangha organization is found *Ibid.*, p. 34-46.
- (3) For a description of this training, see Nand Kishore Prasad, *Studies in Buddhist and Jaina Monachism* (Vaishali, Bihar: Research Institute of Prakrit, Jainology and Ahimsa, 1972), p. 94-99.
- (4) The history and complexity of the term *brahmacharya* are discussed in Jotiya Dhirasekera's *Buddhist Monastic Discipline: A Study of its Origin and Development* (Colombo: Ministry of Higher Education, 1982), p. 21-32.
- (5) For the precepts of the *bhikkhus*, including extensive commentary, see Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Geoffrey DeGraff), *The Buddhist Monastic Code* (Metta Forest Monastery, P.O. Box 1409, Valley Center, CA 92082, 1994), and Charles S. Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline: The Sanskrit Pratimoksha Sutra of the Mahasanghikas and Mulasarvastivadin* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975). For the precepts of the *bhikkhunis*, see Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Sisters in Solitude: Two Traditions of Buddhist Monastic Precepts for Women* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996).
- (6) For a discussion of the etymology of the term *Pratimoksha*, see Sukumar Dutt, *Early Monachism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1984), p. 71-75.
- (7) Additional commentary on the precepts is found in the *Somdet Phra Maha Saman. a Chao Krom Phraya, Samantapasadika: Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Vinaya Pitaka*, Vol. 8 (London: Pali Text Society, 1977).

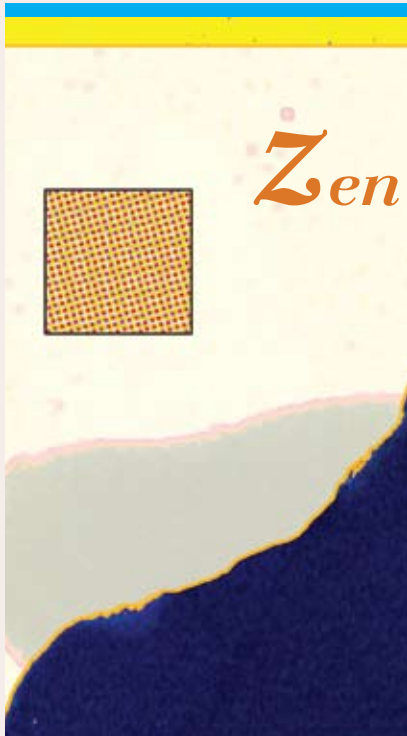
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# PAINTED DUST



## *Particles of Zen Practice*



Shamelessly, over  
The ant colonies, tulips  
Dismember themselves.

Beginner's Mind is what the accomplished expert lacks. Having most of—if not all of—the answers means the questions are vanquished—the letter of the law has been satisfied to a “T”. We can now rest assured that God's in His Heaven (and so forth) and we won't have to be in awe of the mysteries ever again. We won't have to deal with any troublesome questions, won't have to ask them, and, best of all, we'll have nothing left to do but to get in line and follow the expert wherever she or he may lead!

This is *not* the Way of Zen.

As we miss the present moment, we are instantly reborn into the realm of space-time, birth and death—with all its karma.

In the present moment, we are in the Ultimate, where no consciousness of present moment can stand—for consciousness itself requires space-time. But our conscious breathing can take us there. It is at once our anchor and our wings.

The universes, like rippling metal curtains clang together making multi-dimensional curves of space-time—endless opportunities for karma.

Fear—like other things in our karmic seed store—feeds on time. The timeless realm of the Ultimate is fearless—without any awareness of fear *or* fearlessness. It is karmaless, birthless, deathless. It has no trace of itself. It *is tracelessness* itself. Find the way that has no way to find it, and you have arrived in the Ultimate.

There is no way to The Way. There is only The Way.

Here, in this silence, roars the Dharma—ever louder, the more profound this silence. Yet outside, in the chatter and clatter, whispers the Still Small Voice. Still Small Voice in the Roar and the Roar in the Still Small Voice.

All aversion hatred  
All attraction greed  
The birdsong, the traffic

The spring rains sing to me: “My joy and my sorrow have a common well, a common root.”

The little hands of the rain applaud against the new green leaflets, teaching me, reminding me: Our tears are also our cheers.

Zen means limiting—if not eliminating—excess. Nothing added, no trace. So, as always, with a full mind, I humbly submit to emptiness—to dropping everything, even this project of dropping everything—even this mind.

Pray, help me let go of this raft if ever I do reach the other shore.  
And then I myself may be a boat,  
a raft, a bridge.



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**Philip Toy**, Order of Interbeing, Chan Tue Lon, is an ordained member of Thich Nhat Hanh's lay monastic order and co-founder with his wife, Judith, of Cloud Cottage Sangha in Black Mountain, North Carolina.

# AN ETHICAL FRAMEWORK



*In this final article in the series on Buddhist ethics Xianyang Carl Jerome presents a framework for making ethical decisions based on the specifics described in the previous articles in the series, which can be found in the archives at [www.RightviewOnline.org](http://www.RightviewOnline.org)*

**P**erhaps the most significant difference between traditional Buddhist morality and Abrahamic (Hebrew Scriptures-based) morality is that the latter is theistic, given by God, clear and absolute. Even when it is situational it is theistic to its core. There are commandments, “You musts”; failure to adhere to these “laws” results in punishment, both in this life and the eternal next life. There is no wiggle room here. Either you do what you are told, or you don’t.

Buddhism, on the other hand, offers only guidelines, guidelines which arise from practice, such as the precepts, and the implications of conditionality, karma, the three dharma seals (impermanence, non-self, and tranquility), the Four Noble Truths, Right View (which is the beginning and the end of the Noble Eightfold Path), and practicing with the *paramitas*, to list just a few, as well as the central point of departure for Buddhist decision-making: compassion informed by wisdom. All together and individually, these it would seem are key elements of the Buddhist ethical framework.

Determining which of these principles applies, evaluating their implications and the relative weightiness of each before making an ethical decision is no easy practice, especially since so many of our daily choices are made in the moment, and not after long and careful deliberation.

## **ETHICS AND CONDITIONED CAUSALITY**

Because everything is causally conditioned and empty, the Buddhadharmā points us to the implications of our actions in impermanence and no-self when making ethical decisions.

Impermanence begs us to realize that everything is undergoing change; everything is evolving. Even our understanding of the dharma! Certainly our understanding of ethical decision-making criteria. And so impermanence asks us not to hold too firmly to any idea or principle, any preconceived notion of how things should be. It calls to us to look afresh at each event as it arises in front of us. Impermanence means, here, that people can change. Concepts like “the criminal mind” and “Once a thief, always a thief” are not Buddhist in nature.

No-self leads us to a position where it is difficult to see oneself as separate from all others and their actions. This gives us a certain amount of responsibility for any set of circumstances in which we find ourselves. Acknowledging this makes for better ethical choices. There is no one to blame or get blamed, for example; blamer and blamed, no difference.

The non-self belief, the belief that we have no permanent, abiding self, prevents Buddhism from having a “Do unto others” norm--because

ultimately there is no I or others to do or be done unto. Also, doing unto others is not a fundamentally wholesome dictum for it justifies imposing one's will on others. Instead, there is a "Do what is appropriate" guideline that arises from compassion and wisdom, which in turn arises from the concepts of impermanence and no-self, and which makes it hard to go astray from wholesomeness.

## KARMA

At the very least, it would seem, one should willingly accept karmic responsibility for one's actions, and the suffering that may ensue from one's ethical decisions.

For Buddhists whether we do good or bad matters, it does make a difference. Good actions are encouraged by the belief in karma because they lead to a life of greater ease and peace; bad actions are discouraged by the belief in karma because they increase our anxiety and general dissatisfaction with our lives, making our journey along the path more difficult. And in Buddhism, the journey is not taken in just this short lifetime, it is taken from beginningless time to endless time, so we are not in a hurry, not anxiety-ridden about reaching salvation quickly or else.

This extended time for the working out of our karma allows us to develop at a reasonable pace, which is different for each of us. Because all choices have karmic consequences, all choices, even seemingly innocent choices, like whether or not to brush our teeth in the morning, are in fact ethical choices and karma teaches us to always do good, period.

When we have made a mistake, regardless of its magnitude, an honest acknowledgment of doing something wrong and allowing regret to arise leads to the decision not to do it again, which can lessen the negative effects of an unwholesome act. Regret is an important concept in Buddhism, and it replaces the Western idea of guilt which leads to unnecessary suffering instead of corrective action.

## FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

**First Noble Truth** Because we don't perceive things as they are, which is impermanent and changing, but rather as permanent and abiding, life is always fragile and in one way or another, unsatisfactory: life is *dukkha*.

When making ethical choices, we should be guided by an aspiration, a commitment, to making choices that would appear to reduce *dukkha* for other sentient beings and for ourselves. The Epicurean formula for a better life, to seek that which is pleasurable and avoid that which is unpleasant, is illogical in the Buddhist view because as we see in the First Noble Truth, both the seeking of pleasure and the avoidance of pain cause an increase in suffering—the exact opposite of what we are aiming to achieve.

**Second Noble Truth** In everyday language, the more we cling, the more we suffer; the more we attach, the more we are frustrated and unhappy.

When making ethical decisions, then, we want to be aware of our clinging so we can make clearer decisions that arise from our hearts, from our Buddhature, and not so much from our attachments and delusions. By knowing the cause of suffering we have an ethical and moral obligation to act in ways that minimize and eliminate the conditions necessary for suffering to arise. So when making ethical and moral decisions we might ask ourselves: Where is my clinging in this situation, what am I liking or disliking, what am I desirous of or feeling an aversion toward? **The guiding principle here is to actively interfere in those processes that create suffering, those patterns and habits in our lives that encourage the development of craving, clinging, and attachment.**

**Third Noble Truth** The most important of the Four Noble Truths, from our perspective here, is the Third Noble Truth, the Buddha's discovery that there is such a thing as complete freedom

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from suffering. In Western thought one suffers until one dies, whereas the Buddha claimed that it is possible for us to end all our suffering in this life. There is extinction; there is nirvana. It is possible for each of us now.

What this means in an ethical context is that we should make decisions which drive us all in this direction, in the direction of our Buddhature. We should make ethical decisions that encourage and promote extinction. In other words we should make decisions that cause conditions to arise that move us away from ignorance and delusion, clinging and craving, greed, anger, and the like. This is a profound and complex concept, but the more we practice with it, the more easily we see how to practice with it more skillfully.

**Fourth Noble Truth** The Noble Eightfold Path is the path to liberation, the path to ending suffering. It is a list of behavioral norms for spiritual development. It covers ethics, meditation, and wisdom, which is the understanding necessary to apply Buddhist teachings in a pure and wholesome way.

Delineating each of the eight factors of the path (Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration) is not within the scope of this article; offering one perspective from which to understand and apply them, however, is possible: Right View can be seen as informing every other factor. Using this perspective, one can approach the Noble Eightfold Path in a way that opens the door to ethical decision-making.

So with Right View, for example, Right Speech requires us to examine how our speech affects others and ourselves with an eye toward reducing or eliminating *dukkha*. Are we bringing some-

thing of spiritual value into someone's mind with a remark, or are we causing *suffering* to increase by gossiping or lying? Are we causing mistrust to arise, or peace of mind? And so on.

Examining our choices from this perspective and from the perspective of each of these interrelated factors can offer clarity to the event, allowing for more wholesome and appropriate choices.

**PARAMITAS|||  
AND COMPASSION**

In Buddhism today, perhaps more in the Mahayana than the Theravada tradition, but not exclusively, attention is focused on cultivating the six *paramitas*, the six perfections or virtues: (1) **giving selflessly**, (2) **being morally upright**, (3) **facing every situation with patience**, and **doing these with the** (4) **energy of right effort**,

(5) **supported by meditation** and (6) **wisdom**. These serve as an ethical foundation on which we can stand and reference ourselves.

The first three—generosity, ethical correctness, and patience—are easy to understand as virtues to be perfected, but why are they lumped together with the last three—right effort, meditation and wisdom? Because the attainment of these first three is only possible if we develop the right character traits to keep us focused and on-target. Developing character traits that produce wisdom and insight, which allows us to respond skillfully in making ethical decisions, leads us to correct ethical choices and aids in reducing suffering.

Further, we see that together the practice of these six *paramitas* leads to deepening our sense of compassion. And compassion in Buddhism isn't a sympathetic response, but a grounding position for our lives and an emphatic call to ethical action. Compassion, therefore, drives practitioners in their *paramita* practices. Happily, the *paramitas* and compassion form a circle of reciprocally beneficial support, each reinforcing the other so that our practice deepens along ethical lines.





It is worth noting here that the *paramitas* act as an antidote for the three poisons (greed, anger/hatred, and delusion) that motivate us to act in unwholesome ways, so it is useful to ask, in decision-making situations, “Is this decision congruent with the spirit of the *paramitas*?”

### **PRECEPTS**

The precepts are basic guidelines or rules by which we can evaluate situations when they arise that require ethical decision-making. For lay people, depending on one’s tradition and situation, there are five, eight, or ten precepts. All Buddhists share the first five: No killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no wrong speech, no intoxicants.

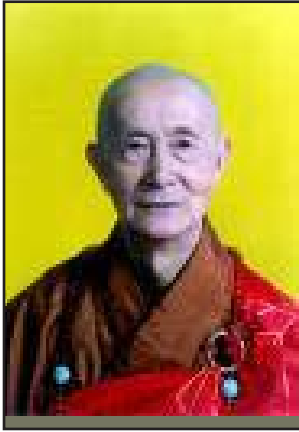
Interpreting these five simple “no” phrases is the challenge here. How strictly or loosely, how narrowly or broadly, you choose to interpret these precepts, and how firmly or flexibly you are attached to those interpretations, will determine their effectiveness in your life as guidelines. In general, though, we can safely say that these precepts are ultimate ethical aims in our practice.

Killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, wrong speech, and using drugs are all inherently blameworthy and inherently unwholesome actions from the traditional Buddhist perspective. Actions in violation of the precepts can range from downright evil and reprehensible, like choosing to kill people for sport, to virtually seemingly commendable, like telling a child not to touch the stovetop because they’ll burn themselves, when in fact the burner was not turned on. Between those extremes is a very conceivable shade of ethical gray, and that is where we practice with the precepts, and with everything else: in the gray.

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## TRANSLATIONS

*A Rightview Quarterly Feature of Original Translations*

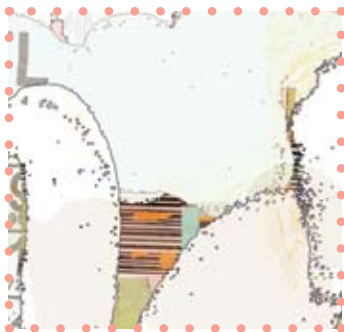


# Nirvana

By Master Yin Shun  
Original translation from  
*Three Essentials of Buddhist Practice*  
by Katherine Lu

Excerpted and edited by  
Xianyang Carl Jerome

*The concept of nirvana is rarely described in print. But here Master Yin Shun, one of the great dharma masters of the 20th century, shows us how important it is to understand nirvana in the context of our practice.*



**The root of our  
vexation comes  
from our egoism  
(ignorance  
about no-self).**

*Nirvana is the most profound and most difficult concept in the Buddhadharma.*

“Nirvana” is a word in Sanskrit meaning negation and dissipation. The ancient Chinese translation of “extinction” or “extinction and ferrying” indicates that something has been dissipated, eliminated but transcended as well. It also includes the meaning of blissfulness --freedom, peace and comfort. This kind of blissfulness is certainly different from happiness in general. Venerable Xuan-Zhuang of the Tang Dynasty translated it as “perfect extinction”. “Perfect” refers to the attainment of all meritorious virtues and “extinction” refers to the dissipation of all evil elements, which in turn leads to the ideal realm of equality, freedom and peaceful joy.

The basic conviction in Buddhism is that all conscious sentient beings live and die; from time immemorial death follows birth and birth follows death. This goes on continuously without end, just like the sun rising from the east and setting in the west day after day. This continuous cycle of life and death creates an issue for us. Shouldn't we strive for permanent peace? If death brought an end to suffering, it would be all right; but this is not the case. After the death of this life, rebirth ensues and we suffer life after life continuously without end. This is a big issue indeed.

A yearning arises in this process of continuous death and rebirth. We yearn for permanent freedom and peace.

Buddhism pays great attention to this issue. What is the Buddhist resolution? We start with acknowledging life to be full of suffering and then move to an understanding of its cause and practices to cause its cessation. The essence of life is filled with painful fac-

tors of impermanence. This is why the process of continuous life and rebirth is filled with pain and joy, tears and laughter. This thing called “self”—the blending of body and mind in the continuing cycle of death and rebirth—is the cause of vexation. Buddhism goes on to consider concepts such as the love for the “self” and egoism to be the root cause of vexations in the cycle of death and rebirth.

In short, the self is nothing but the integrated activity of the body and mind. The conception and birth of a life is only the starting point of the integrated activity of a body and mind. At death, the old blending of body and mind disintegrates and a new blending of body and mind with new integrated activity ensues. The continuous death and rebirth of each life is the integrated activity of each body and mind.

From cradle to grave, sentient beings have spoken and done innumerable things. All those spoken words and physical activities are motivated by the good or evil thoughts of the mind, leaving behind evil or good energy called karma. Karma stays firmly in our body and mind, deeply affecting and controlling us.

Since the results of death and rebirth come from karma, people might think that by eradicating karma, freedom from death and rebirth will be attained. However, the influence of karma may only be reduced but not eliminated, nor is it necessary to do so. The Buddha said, “Karma comes from ignorance.” If we can remove our ignorance, we will be free from the cycle of death and rebirth. What is ignorance? Ignorance is another name for vexation—impure and incorrect elements in our minds.

The root of our vexation comes from our egoism (ignorance about no-self). Most of us do good or bad deeds to benefit ourselves; this is why vexations come from doing good deeds as well as bad deeds. When activities, good or bad, are motivated by our ego, there are vexations. “I” is the root cause for the cycle of death and rebirth.

As we get old and die, the blending of our body and mind is disassembled. But because of the desire of the ego (self-view and self-love), it triggers the good and bad karmas to form a new blending of mind and body, a new individual. Birth

and death and rebirth—this cycle goes on forever. Without this converging force of egoism, we would be liberated from this phenomenon of endless transmigration, we would reach nirvana.

**Thus, death and rebirth are determined by karma; karma is determined by vexations; and the root cause of vexation comes from egoism. The issue of death and rebirth will never be resolved until egoism is eradicated.**

Liberating ourselves from the cycle of death and rebirth will enable us to attain nirvana, a state of non-death. This is the characteristic of nirvana. Buddhist practitioners who practice meditation and cultivate wisdom may gradually eliminate all vexations to reach the state of non-birth and non-death in this life. This is called nirvana.

Today’s Buddhist followers seldom aim at attaining nirvana in this present life. But the original intention of Buddhism was always to place importance on the attainment of nirvana in this present life.

If we can achieve the state of non-self, vexations will be eradicated, nirvana will be attained, karma will not arise and the chain in the cycle of death and rebirth will be broken. We must understand that while karma cause does bring about resulting effect, it still requires the supplementary conditions of vexations. If we terminate the supplementary condition of vexation, our karma will lack the energy to bear any fruit. Hence, the cessation of karma does not mean that there is no more karma, but that karma has come to pass, leaving no more retribution. Once vexation is terminated, the seed of karma will wither, also terminating cause and effect in the cycle of death and rebirth forever.

To answer the questions raised by his disciples who wanted a description of nirvana, the Buddha gave them a parable. Holding a burning torch in his hand, he waved it. The fire was extinguished. The Buddha then asked, “Where did the fire go?” It was impossible to describe the fire or to tell its whereabouts. The cessation of life and death and the realization of nirvana are just like the fire.



**In short, the self is nothing but the integrated activity of the body and mind.**



**The original  
intention of Buddhism  
was to place  
importance on the  
attainment of  
nirvana in this  
present life.**

We may say that somebody has entered the state of nirvana; but we may not say that he is still an individual entity. We may say that the waters from the Yellow and Yangzi Rivers flow into the sea; but we may not expect to separate the water of Yellow River from the water of Yangzi River once they have blended in the sea. In nirvana, all things are integrated into one absolute equanimity. The scripture says, “the extinguished is immeasurable.” Nirvana (extinction) cannot be measured in amount, number, time, weight, space, etc. In the sea of equanimity nothing is distinguishable.

**Once entering nirvana, where one came from and where one has gone are no longer traceable. This means that the person is nowhere and everywhere. This is why it is so difficult to comprehend the state of nirvana, for we must not try to comprehend it through “I” or any concept related to “I.”** If we cannot shake off “I,” we will never grasp nirvana. After attaining nirvana, the body and mind are vanished and extinguished. The meanings of vanish, extinguish and tranquil are similar.

In nirvana, there is no difference between you and “I.” After entering nirvana, eternity is indeed eternity because everything is perfect and so does not increase, decrease or change.

After the attainment of enlightenment, pure meritorious virtues will arise. The impure mind, though suppressed, still possesses the potential to flare up periodically. The battle to overcome impurities and vexations continues until we have eradicated all the impure seeds in us. Only then will we achieve pure liberation, which is also the attainment of ultimate nirvana.

As we transform our impure mind into pure mind, not only will we eliminate all impurities, we will also achieve immeasurable meritorious virtues of purity and boundless supreme power. Nirvana, according to Mahayana Buddhism, is therefore neither empty nor useless.

## CONCLUSIONS

*What we consider to be the great problem of life and death results from our attachment to the self.*

*In order to end the cycle of life and death, we must let go of self. Only then will we attain the ultimate nirvana.*

*The difference between saints and the rest of us lies in the concept of self and non-self. Saints have discarded the self, the rest of us have not.*

*Once we enter nirvana, everything is eternal, peaceful, free and pure; there is no restraint, no conflict, no persecution, no suffering as all these arise from our attachment to our self.*

*In nirvana, suffering is gone. There is only tranquility and equality.*

*Nirvana is beyond explanation and imagination.*

*Only through the profound wisdom of no-self and the practice of the Buddhadharma can we attain enlightenment and realize eternal equality and liberation.*

## Master Yin Shun Brief Biography

Venerable Yin Shun (1904-2005) is considered the greatest Chinese Buddhist intellectual of the 20th century. As a student of Master Tai Xu, the reformer monk of the 1930s who shifted Chinese Buddhism from an insular monastic practice to a worldwide and worldly humanistic practice, he adopted and disseminated the new Chinese humanistic Buddhism. Briefly, humanistic Buddhism promotes the integration of people's spiritual practice into all aspects of their daily lives.

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

Unfortunately, the great difficulty in translating Yinshun Fashi's writings has made him all but unknown outside of the Chinese speaking Buddhist community, even though he wrote more than 50 books. Part of problem is the spherical nature of his writing style, part of the problem is that he wrote in classical Buddhist Chinese and modern Chinese simultaneously, and part of the problem is that the depth of Buddhist practice needed to understand his writings and translate them seems to eliminate all but Buddhist scholar-monks from this task.

Venerable Yin Shun's only book in translation is *The Way To Buddhahood*; it is considered a masterpiece of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism.





# Those Pictures



*Cambodian Buddhist monks engaged in a street fistfight during a protest to demand religious freedom for their fellow monks living in southern Vietnam (April 20, 2007)*

*“Did you see those pictures; they set us back ten years,” a woman in Chicago said to Xianyang Carl Jerome in passing. He nodded his head in silence. Now he reflects on his own reactions to the pictures.*

Those pictures reminded me, in a profound and moving way, as had the picture of Duc’s self-immolation in protest over the American presence in Viet Nam four decades ago, that protests arising from anger are not the middle way, regardless of their alleged “good” intention. And in reminding me so emphatically of that, of the need to have a life engaged in this world through acts that encourage peace and harmony to arise, those pictures reaffirmed my belief in the validity of my Bodhisattva Vows.

The pictures also reminded me of my commitment to practice lovingkindness and compassion, informed by wisdom, toward all beings, always and everywhere, and specifically toward the monks in the picture whose “well-meaning” action had not at all achieved its goal. When those young monks went into the streets I doubt that they had any intention of starting a brawl or angering Buddhists halfway around the globe who would feel betrayed by monastics setting such an “unwholesome” example in such a public way. It is worth noting, and more than just parenthetically, that those are Khmer monks, monks from the same tradition as Duc, who have had their temples and practices ravaged and destroyed, and their teachers tortured and imprisoned by wars and governments for over half century now. That they are still able to uphold any monastic practice is a testament to the deep karmic roots of their tradition; that they might react so strongly to religious persecution and oppression is understandable, if not at all laudable.

As I thought more about the pictures, two further issues arose for me. One was about the expectation of a monk as example. The other was about what Buddhism has to offer as a base for social engagement, since on one level or another we are always socially engaged.

First, while monastics and other Buddhist clerics and teachers are examples of the potential of the Buddhadharma, expecting perfection from them is not reasonable --at least not until they reach aratship, in which case it won't be an issue.

All of us have weaknesses in our practices, and it is precisely by working with those weaknesses that we deepen our practice. Stop doing evil; do only good. That is our practice. Stumbling along the way, that too is our practice. Those monks protesting in Cambodia have stumbled, and we need to support them. Compassion informed by wisdom would seem to lead us to support them in rebuilding their practices, not to condemnation.

And second, thinking about this incident led me to try clarifying what Buddhism offers as a foundation from which social engagement can arise. Like an A-frame house, the supports and beams that rest on this foundation should all point toward the larger goal of our practice-- peace and harmony and the end of *dukkha*. The mix that forms this foundation? I suggest that this foundation has five components, all of which blend together to make a solid foundation. They are:

### **1. Compassion informed by wisdom**

Without wisdom, the idea of compassion can easily be distorted, as we see in individual cases, like those of the monks pictured here. And in cases where the collective self, with its natural amorality, uses compassion collectively, compassion is used to explain away everything from ethnic cleansing and terrorism to "justifiable" wars.

### **2. Non-Violence**

This arises from wisdom, and from just about everywhere else in Buddhist thought, and from the common sense understanding that we can't fight for peace (anger only begets anger, as the Dharmapada reminds us).

### **3. Reconciliation**

Every situation can be reconciled in the Buddhist view, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama has shown so emphatically by his example over the last half-century.

### **4. No-self**

Self is the driving force behind our *dukkha*, individually and collectively; no-self is the source of social engagement which realizes that our liberation is tied to everyone else's liberation (Emptiness and the Bodhisattva Ideal).

### **5. Emptiness**

Emptiness is what pulls the rug out from under our feet as we espouse views, which we then have to defend, as illustrated in *those pictures*.

Wisdom, it seems to this writer, more than any other aspect of our practice, is what should guide us through the fog of our cultural delusions and leanings toward activism and into right social engagement.

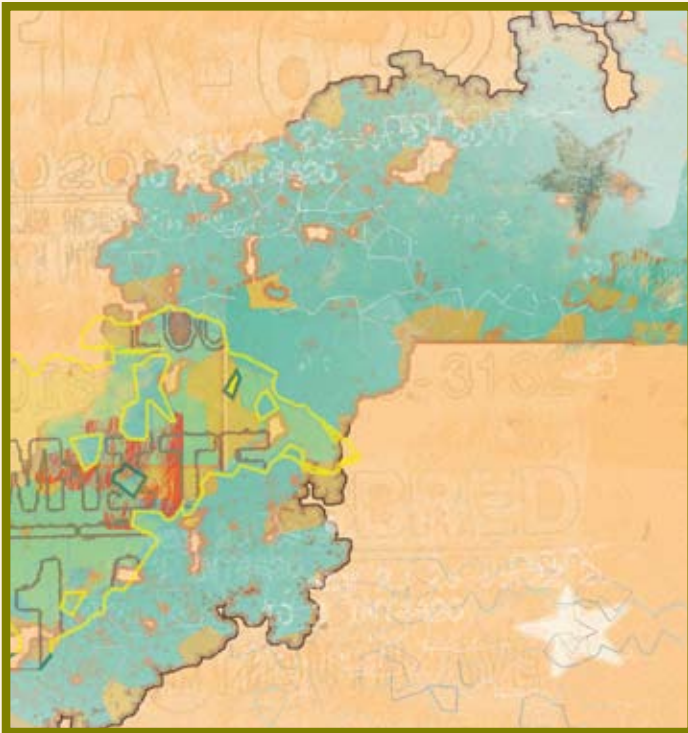
## SN 12.65 Nagara Sutta: The City

THIS IS FIRST IN A SERIES PRESENTING  
THE BUDDHA'S THREE CARDINAL SUTRAS,  
TRANSLATED FROM THE PALI BY  
THANISSARO BHIKKHU.

**Editor's Note:** Dependent origination, the opening concept of this sutra, provides us with a basis for seeing beyond our individuality to the universal oneness of Buddhanature, and that, of course, is the sightline to ending *dukkha*, the sightline to no-self. Dependent origination teaches us why we are born, what we're doing here, and what happens next.

--Xianyang Carl Jerome

### Nagara Sutta



**Dwelling at Savatthi...** “Monks, before my awakening, when I was just an unawakened bodhisattva, the realization came to me: ‘How this world has fallen on difficulty! It is born, it ages, it dies, it falls away and re-arises, but it does not discern the escape from this stress, from this aging and death. O when will it discern the escape from this dukkha, from this aging and death?’

“Then the thought occurred to me, ‘Aging and death exist when what exists? From what as a requisite condition is there aging and death?’ From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: ‘Aging and death exist when birth exists. From birth as a requisite condition comes aging and death.’ Then the thought occurred to me, ‘Birth exists when what exists? From what as a

requisite condition comes birth?’ From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: ‘Birth exists when becoming exists. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth... ‘Name-and-form exists when what exists? From what as a requisite condition is there name-and-form?’ From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: ‘Name-and-form exists when consciousness exists. From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form.’ Then the thought occurred to me, ‘Consciousness exists when what exists? From what as a requisite condition comes consciousness?’ From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: ‘Consciousness exists when name-and-form exists. From name-and-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness.’

“Then the thought occurred to me, ‘This consciousness turns back at name-and-form, and goes no farther. It is to this extent that there is birth, aging, death, falling away, and re-arising, i.e., from name-and-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness, from consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form. From name-and-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media... Thus is the origination of this entire mass of dukkha. Origination, origination.’ Vision arose, clear knowing arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before.

“Then the thought occurred to me, ‘Aging and death don’t exist when what doesn’t exist? From the cessation of

what comes the cessation of aging and death?’ From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: ‘Aging and death don’t exist when birth doesn’t exist. From the cessation of birth comes the cessation of aging and death.’... ‘Name-and-form doesn’t exist when what doesn’t exist? From the cessation of what comes the cessation of name-and-form?’ From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment:

Name-and-form doesn’t exist when consciousness doesn’t exist. From the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-and-form.’ Then the thought occurred to me, ‘Consciousness doesn’t exist when what doesn’t exist? From the cessation of what comes the cessation of consciousness?’ From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: ‘Consciousness doesn’t exist when name-and-form doesn’t exist. From the cessation of name-and-form comes the cessation of consciousness.’

“The thought occurred to me, ‘I have attained this path to Awakening, i.e., from the cessation of name-and-form comes the cessation of consciousness, from the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-and-form. From the cessation of name-and-form comes the cessation of the six sense media. From the cessation of the six sense media comes the cessation of contact. From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling. From the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving. From the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging/sustenance. From the cessation of clinging/sustenance

*comes the cessation of becoming. From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair all cease. Thus is the cessation of this entire mass of dukkha. Cessation, cessation.’ Vision arose, clear knowing arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before.*

*“It is just as if a man, traveling along a wilderness track, were to see an ancient path, an ancient road, traveled by people of former times. He would follow it. Following it, he would see an ancient city, an ancient capital inhabited by people of former times, complete with parks, groves, and ponds, walled, delightful. He would go to address the king or the king’s minister, saying, ‘Sire, you should know that while traveling along a wilderness track I saw an ancient path... I followed it... I saw an ancient city, an ancient capital... complete with parks, groves, and ponds, walled, delightful. Sire, rebuild that city!’ The king or king’s minister would rebuild the city, so that at a later date the city would become powerful, rich, and well-populated, fully grown and prosperous.*

*“In the same way I saw an ancient path, an ancient road, traveled by the Rightly Self-awakened Ones of former times.*

*“And what is that ancient path, that ancient road, traveled by the Rightly Self-awakened Ones of former times? Just this noble eightfold path: right view, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right*

*livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. That is the ancient path, the ancient road, traveled by the Rightly Self-awakened Ones of former times. I followed that path. Following it, I came to direct knowledge of aging and death, direct knowledge of the origination of aging and death, direct knowledge of the cessation of aging and death, direct knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of aging and death. I followed that path. Following it, I came to direct knowledge of birth... becoming... clinging... craving... feeling... contact... the six sense media... name-and-form... consciousness, direct knowledge of the origination of consciousness, direct knowledge of the cessation of consciousness, direct knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of consciousness. I followed that path.*

*“Following it, I came to direct knowledge of fabrications, direct knowledge of the origination of fabrications, direct knowledge of the cessation of fabrications, direct knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of fabrications. Knowing that directly, I have revealed it to monks, nuns, male lay followers and female lay followers, so that this holy life has become powerful, rich, detailed, well-populated, wide-spread, proclaimed among celestial and human beings.”*





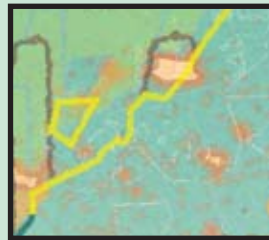
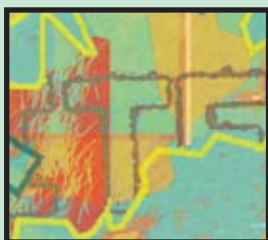
## *Editor's Comments*

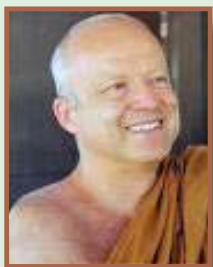
*As the great Thai monk, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, said: "The doctrine of dependent origination is the core or essence of Buddhism." Buddhadasa then went on to explain: "When the Venerable Ananda told the Buddha he found the doctrine of dependent origination evident and easy to comprehend, the Buddha replied, 'Ananda, do not say that. The doctrine of dependent origination is so profound that sentient beings are unable to comprehend it. They are unable to...perceive the process of dependent arising. Consequently, they are perplexed....' The Buddha is telling us not to treat the doctrine of dependent origination lightly; he is telling us that we should devote ourselves to the study of this doctrine."*

*The Buddha sometimes explained dependent origination in descending order, from twelve to one, and sometimes in ascending order from one to twelve, and sometimes in shortened, segmented versions.*

*Regardless of how one approaches dependent origination, how one understands it at this moment in time and space, dependent origination is the cornerstone of the Buddhadharma and any serious practice. It is the cornerstone of this first of the Three Cardinal Sutras. The second Cardinal Sutra will be featured in the next issue of Rightview Quarterly.*

*In thinking about this sutra, you might want to consider: If there were no ancient path, would the Buddhadharma be possible? What is the relationship of the noble eightfold path to dependent origination? And what does this tell you about how to end your own dukkha? Finally, what is the Buddha suggesting in this sutra's looping of consciousness and name-and-form, and about the relationship of this looped consciousness to dukkha and the ending of dukkha?*





# Fearless Optimism

## *And The Way*

THANISSARO BHIKKHU, A.K.A. AJAHN GEOFF,  
EXPLAINS HOW THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS ARE  
A SOURCE OF GREAT BRIGHTNESS AND  
OPTIMISM FOR THOSE WHO FOLLOW THE PATH.

**“He showed me the brightness of the world.”**

That’s how my teacher, Ajaan Fuang, once characterized his debt to his teacher, Ajaan Lee. His words took me by surprise. I had only recently come to study with him, still fresh from a school where I had learned that serious Buddhists took a negative, pessimistic view of the world. Yet here was a man who had given his life to the practice of the Buddha’s teachings, speaking of the world’s brightness. Of course, by “brightness” he wasn’t referring to the joys of the arts, food, travel, sports, family life, or any of the other sections of the Sunday newspaper. He was talking about a deeper happiness that comes from within. As I came to know him, I gained a sense of how deeply happy he was. He may have been skeptical about a lot of human pretenses, but I would never describe him as negative or pessimistic. “Realistic” would be closer to the truth. Yet for a long time I couldn’t shake the sense of paradox I felt over how the pessimism of the Buddhist texts could find embodiment in such a solidly happy person.

Only when I began to look directly at the early texts did I realize that what I thought was a paradox was actually an irony — the irony of how Buddhism, which gives such a positive view of a human being’s potential for finding true happiness, could be branded in the West as negative and pessimistic.

You’ve probably heard the rumor that “Life is suffering” is Buddhism’s first principle, the Buddha’s First Noble Truth. It’s a rumor with good credentials spread by well-respected

academics and Dharma teachers alike, but a rumor nonetheless. The truth about the noble truths is far more interesting. The Buddha taught four truths—not one—about life: There is suffering, there is a cause for suffering, there is an end of suffering, and there is a path of practice that puts an end to suffering. These truths, taken as a whole, are far from pessimistic. They’re a practical, problem-solving approach—the way a doctor approaches an illness, or a mechanic a faulty engine. You identify a problem and look for its cause. You then put an end to the problem by eliminating the cause.

What’s special about the Buddha’s approach is that the problem he attacks is the whole of human suffering, and the solution he offers is something human beings can do for themselves. Just as a doctor with a surefire cure for measles isn’t afraid of measles, the Buddha isn’t afraid of any aspect of human suffering. And, having experienced a happiness totally unconditional, he’s not afraid to point out the suffering and stress inherent in places where most of us would rather not see it—in the conditioned pleasures we cling to. He teaches us not to deny that suffering and stress or to run away from it, but to stand still and face up to it, to examine it carefully. That way, by understanding it, we can ferret out its cause and put an end to it. Totally. How confident can you get?

A fair number of writers have pointed out the basic confidence inherent in the Four Noble Truths, and yet the rumor of Buddhism’s pessimism persists. Why? One possible explanation is that, in coming to Buddhism, we subconsciously

expect it to address issues that have a long history in our own culture. By starting out with suffering as his first truth, the Buddha seems to be offering his position on one of the oldest questions: Is the world basically good or bad?

**A**ccording to Genesis, this was the first question that occurred to God after he had finished his creation: had he done a good job? He then looked at the world and saw that it was good. Ever since then, people in the West have sided with or against God on his answer, but in doing so they have affirmed that the question was worth asking to begin with. When Theravada — the only form of Buddhism to take on Christianity when Europe colonized Asia — was looking for ways to head off what it saw as the missionary menace, Buddhists who had received their education from the missionaries assumed that the question was valid and pressed the first noble truth into service as a refutation of the Christian God: look at how

answers to this question, he says: (1) nothing is worthy of approval, (2) everything is, and (3) some things are and some things aren't. If you take any of these three positions, you end up arguing with the people who take either of the other two positions. And where does that get you?

The Buddha then teaches Long-nails to look at his body and feelings as instances of the first noble truth: they're stressful, inconstant, and don't deserve to be clung to as self. Long-nails follows the Buddha's instructions and, in letting go of his attachment to body and feelings, gains his first glimpse of the deathless, of what it's like to be totally free from suffering.

The point of this story is that trying to answer God's question, passing judgment on the world, is a waste of time. And it offers a better use for the first noble truth: looking at things, not in terms of "world" or "life," but simply identifying

**What's special about the Buddha's approach is that the problem he attacks is the whole of human suffering, and the solution he offers is something human beings can do for themselves.**

miserable life is, they said, and it's hard to accept God's verdict on his handiwork.

This debating strategy may have scored a few points at the time, and it's easy to find Buddhist apologists who keep trying to score the same points. The real issue, though, is whether the Buddha intended his first noble truth to answer God's question in the first place and more importantly whether we're getting the most out of the first noble truth if we see it in this light.

It's hard to imagine what you could accomplish by saying that life is suffering. You'd have to spend your time arguing with people who see more than just suffering in life. The Buddha himself says as much in one of his discourses. A brahman named Long-nails (Dighanakha) comes to him and announces that he doesn't approve of anything. This would have been a perfect time for the Buddha, if he had wanted, to chime in with the truth that life is suffering. Instead, he attacks the whole notion of taking a stand on whether life is worthy of approval. There are three possible

suffering so that you can comprehend it, let it go, and attain release. Rather than asking us to make a blanket judgment which in effect would be asking us to be blind partisans, the first noble truth asks us to look and see precisely where the problem of suffering lies.

Other discourses show that the problem isn't with body and feelings in and of themselves. They themselves aren't suffering. The suffering lies in clinging to them. In his definition of the first noble truth, the Buddha summarizes all types of suffering under the phrase, "the five aggregates of clinging": clinging to physical form (including the body), feelings, perceptions, thought constructs, and consciousness. However, when the five aggregates are free from clinging, he tells us, they lead to long-term benefit and happiness.

**S**o the first noble truth, simply put, is that clinging is suffering. It's because of clinging that physical pain becomes mental pain. It's because of clinging that aging, illness, and death cause mental distress. The paradox here is that, in

*When the actual truth is that clinging is suffering, we simply have to look for the clinging and eliminate its causes.*

clinging to things, we don't trap them or get them under our control. Instead we trap ourselves. When we realize our captivity, we naturally search for a way out, and this is where it's so important that the First Noble Truth not say that "Life is suffering." If life were suffering, where would we look for an end to suffering? We'd be left with nothing but death and annihilation. But when the actual truth is that clinging is suffering, we simply have to look for the clinging and eliminate its causes.

This process takes time, though, because we can't simply tell the mind not to cling. It's like a disobedient child: if you force it to let go while you're looking, it'll search for a blind spot where you can't see it, and will start to cling there. In fact the mind's major blind spot—ignorance—is the prime cause for the arising of clinging's proximate cause: craving. So, as the fourth noble truth, the Buddha recommends a path of practice to get rid of the blind spot. The path has eight factors: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. In a more abbreviated form, the Buddha's term for the practice is "abandoning and developing": abandoning activities that hinder awareness, and developing qualities that expand its clarity and range. The abandoning, in which you refrain from unskillful thoughts, words, and deeds inspired by craving, is obviously an antidote to clinging. The developing plays a more paradoxical role, for you have to hold to the skillful qualities of mindfulness, concentration, and discernment that foster awareness until they're fully mature. Only then

can you let them go. It's like climbing a ladder to get on a roof: you grab hold of a higher rung so that you can let go of a lower rung, and then grab onto a rung still higher. As the rungs get further off the ground, your view gets more expansive and you can see precisely where your mind's clingings are. You get a sharper sense of which parts of experience belong to which noble truth and what should be done with them: the parts that are suffering should be comprehended; the parts that cause suffering should be abandoned; the parts that form the path to the end of suffering should be further developed; and the parts that belong to the end of suffering should be verified. This helps you get higher and higher on the ladder until you find yourself securely on the roof. That's when you can finally let go of the ladder and be totally free.

**So the real question we face is not God's question, passing judgment on how skillfully he created life or the world. It's our question: how skillfully are we handling the raw stuff of life?** Are we clinging in ways that serve only to continue the round of suffering, or are we learning to hold to the ladder-like qualities that will eliminate craving and ignorance so that we can grow up and not have to cling. If we negotiate life armed with all four noble truths, realizing that life contains both suffering and an end to suffering, there's hope: hope that we'll be able to sort out which parts of life belong to which truth; hope that someday, in this life, we'll discover the brightness at the point where we can agree with the Buddha, "Oh. Yes. This is the end of suffering and stress."



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





# Life Lessons

by **Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche**

Translated by Chojor Radha and  
edited by Tina Armond

**This is the last in our lineage series from the Karma Kayu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Marpa and Milarepa are presented here and their lives richly illustrate what practice can do for us today. The lives of Naropa and Tilopa, their predecessors, are archived at [rightviewonline.org](http://rightviewonline.org).**



MARPA



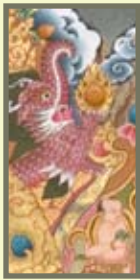
MILAREPA

***The Karma Kayu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism traces its origins to Shakyamuni Buddha through Marpa the Great Translator, who traveled to India to bring authentic Buddhist teachings to Tibet. His teacher, Naropa, received the lineage transmission from Tilopa, and so on back to the Buddha himself.***





**MARPA (1012-1097)** was born in the southern part of Tibet known as Lhodak. He was one of four sons. From birth Marpa was naturally very powerful, and he displayed many energies and strengths. Just as the nature of fire is warmth, the nature of Marpa was to be powerful. As a fire grows, its warmth increases; and as Marpa grew, his power increased. His natural power was so great that even his own parents, if they looked directly into his eyes, were unable to bear the feeling of strength coming from him. When he was young, he was sent to a teacher named Lugsyepa to study. Marpa's understanding and wisdom was so profound that he quickly surpassed his teacher's knowledge.



Not only did Marpa look fearsome, he was also quite aggressive. His natural look of power and strength so frightened all the people in his village that he was not welcome in their homes. In fact, the only people Marpa could visit in his village were his teacher and his one friend. All the rest developed a fear of the magnetic power that Marpa displayed, and they would not welcome him.

Being feared and unpopular, Marpa was sent far from home for his higher education to a teacher known as Drokmi Lotsawa the Translator. From him Marpa learned writing and reading, poetry, drama, and so forth. Marpa studied under Drokmi for fifteen years, and became a master of Sanskrit as well as Tibetan.



Having mastered those languages, Marpa returned to his home village, but he was not to stay long. He decided to go to Nepal for further study, even though the journey from Tibet to Nepal was arduous and dangerous. But when he reached Nepal he learned that one of the most famous scholars and masters of meditation, Naropa, was in India, so he traveled again to seek out this most accomplished teacher.

At that time India was divided into many states and kingdoms, all with different kings; because of this, the biggest problem was getting through customs. One was always crossing borders

between states, and at customs they would take anything valuable, so that by the time one reached one's destination one would probably be walking naked, so to speak, through India.

Despite all these hardships, Marpa prevailed and met his Naropa. And because of the hardships that Marpa was willing to go through, all the Karma Kagyu traditions and teachings became available, and are available in the same way now. Without him they would not be available; without him the Kagyu tradition would not exist.

In the 11th century when Marpa was translating the teachings from Sanskrit to Tibetan, Marpa himself went through all the hardships of the practice and communicated in the translation the experience of the teachings as well. In Tibetan this is called "tasting the realization." Thus he made the teachings available in their fullness. Marpa studied, worked, translated, and practiced for over forty years in this way.

When Marpa returned to Tibet, it was the custom that translators not give word-for-word literal translations of teachings. Instead they had to first practice further and reach realization of the inner meaning of the teachings. Only then were the translators allowed to actually translate, as then they brought experience and understanding to the words. Thanks to the dedication and persistence of Marpa and these translators, many practitioners have achieved realization from following their words, a further proof that the teachings were accurately translated, with the inner meaning conveyed.

Marpa had already visited India twice when the dakinis predicted that he must visit India again. But he was quite old at this time, and his students in Tibet were very concerned about his undertaking such a rough journey. Since he was not very strong nor in very good health, they suggested that he might send his son, Dharma Dode, in his place. Not listening to the advice of his students, Marpa left Tibet for India in accord with the predictions of the dakinis.

On the journey Marpa met Lord Atisha, who said to him that Naropa had already "left." Now Atisha used a very polite form of the word "left" so that it

translated as “passing away,” and he gave Marpa no hint as to which pure realm Naropa was currently in. When Marpa arrived in India, he met friends and advanced students of Naropa. When he asked where their teacher was, they told him that Naropa had just disappeared, again suggesting that he had passed on to another realm. They felt, though, that Marpa, because of his deep devotion to and trust in Naropa, might be able to meet him again if he looked for him.

So Marpa went to seek his teacher, without any clear idea of where he was or how to find him. He began searching in some very remote regions. Then at one point he recognized the footprints of Naropa on a rock. This filled him with new confidence and devotion. Making prayers and supplications, he continued in search of Naropa.

He then came near a tree known as Ashik and saw a vision of Dakmema, the consort of Hevajra. The image of her in the ashik tree was as clear as a mirror and Marpa saw that at her heart were swirling mantras, all very clear. Then Marpa paid his respects and made supplications and said his prayers, but he did not remain at the tree. Instead he continued to search for his guru. Finally, on top of a big rock, he saw Naropa, adorned with six ornaments of bone. Since he had been searching for Naropa for so long, he became filled with joy and went to him on top of the rock and embraced him immediately.



Naropa was very pleased to see Marpa and he said to him, “At this time I am going to reveal a teaching that has never been introduced in the snowy country of Tibet. You will be the one who will take such a precious teaching to Tibet.” Upon hearing that, Marpa offered all the gold that he had brought with him to Naropa. Although Naropa said that he had no real use for gold any more, Marpa still insisted that he should have it in return for the valuable teaching that he was going to give to Tibet. Taking all the gold dust in his hands, Naropa threw it in the air and it fell everywhere on the ground. As Naropa threw the gold and it scattered, Marpa felt a little regret about this action, probably because he had had

so much hardship in bringing such precious gold with him. Naropa seemed to be reading his mind, and with a smile on his face, he opened his palms, and all the gold dust that he had thrown in the air was now again in his palm. Not only that, but Naropa pointed his finger, and at that very moment, the ground where they were sitting was transformed into solid gold.

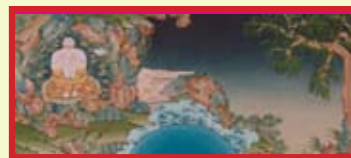


Having done that, Naropa said to Marpa, “Now you must be hungry. Let’s eat something.” And so saying, Naropa gazed up in the sky. At that moment, from the sky fell a huge fish, whose body was filled inside with tsok (feast offerings). Naropa told Marpa it came from the heavenly realm where Tilopa resided, and it came as a heavenly gift, a blessing from Tilopa. So they enjoyed

the feast of tsok, and as they did Marpa’s inner strength, wisdom, and realization matured, simply by enjoying the offering from Tilopa in the heavenly realms.

Having taken and enjoyed this blessing, Marpa once again experienced vital energy, becoming stronger and more youthful; he was no longer feeling the weakness of old age. Naropa then asked Marpa to purify himself further by taking a bath in the small river that was nearby. Marpa went there to take a bath, and took off all his clothes, including a very precious protection that he wore around his neck as a blessing, called a mandala protection. He left that on top of his clothes, and went into the river to bathe.

At that moment, a black crow swooped from the sky and took his mandala blessing into its beak and flew away with it. Naropa, seeing that Marpa’s blessing was being taken away by a black crow, pointed his finger toward the crow, and at that moment, both the crow and the blessing fell to the ground. Now this was a symbolic omen of something in Marpa’s future. It seemed to say that Marpa was going to experience some obstacles and hindrances, not only for himself but also for the lineage of transmission, the *mahamudra*. But Naropa promised Marpa that these obstacles would be eliminated through his special blessing, which he gave to Marpa.



With that promise, Marpa's guru once again gave him all the empowerments that he had already given him before, to refresh the memories of his teachings. In addition to that, he gave a very profound teaching that he had never revealed to anyone before that was called the Six Doctrines of Naropa. Naropa then said, "Now, Marpa, your realization is entirely equal to my realization. There is no need for you to obtain further instructions or empowerments from me. You must go back to Tibet as my regent and spread and cultivate this lineage." At that time Naropa predicted that, although Marpa had seven sons, there would be no continuity of his family in the future, just as no flower could grow in the sky.

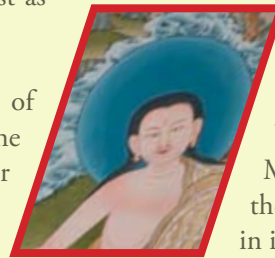
However, Naropa predicted that the line of the lineage holders would continue into the future and that each successive lineage holder and his students would be brighter and have greater opportunity to achieve realization. And when he heard that Marpa's student was Milarepa, he immediately folded his hands together in a gesture of reverence and respect, and bowed toward the direction of northern India. Naropa predicted that where there are beings living in the womb of darkness, Milarepa would be like the sun radiating upon the stainless snow, removing the darkness. It is said that because of this gesture of profound respect, all the trees bowed in that direction.

Having received such a blessing and empowerment, Marpa offered a great feast. With the precious teaching from Naropa, Marpa returned to Tibet and gave many teachings. He was especially trying to spread the teaching of ejection of consciousness, of which he had had a very special transmission. With the accomplishment of this practice one can enter into the physical body of any dead being, and then become that being. Unfortunately, Marpa was not very successful at teaching. He remained short-tempered and aggressive and not many students liked him and not many believed in his realization and his accomplishments.

But when Marpa was passing away he performed many miracles. And after he passed into *parinirvana*, his transmissions became widely

cultivated throughout Tibet. Only then did the people in his village and other villages understand what a highly realized and important person Marpa really was; only then did they start to develop profound feelings for him.

After his passing there were four students who continued to spread Marpa's teachings, or the transmission of Marpa. There were three students who emphasized the learning of the skills that Marpa taught, and only one student, Milarepa, emphasized meditation, the practice and the experience of Marpa's teaching.



### MILAREPA (1052-1135)

was born in the upper part of Tibet, in the state known as Upper Tsang. The meaning of Milarepa's life was to be found in the progress of his life as a teaching in itself. At the beginning of his life, his family had wealth, property, and land. It did not give them pleasure or happiness, but led him and his family to difficulties and hardship.

It is first a teaching on the meaninglessness of samsaric possessions. After the death of his father, Milarepa's life became one of pain and torture dealt out to him at the hands of his aunt and uncle, a life that brings tears to the eyes of many beings. This led to the next lesson. Because of the terrible punishment inflicted on Milarepa, he desired to seek revenge. He learned and performed feats of black magic for the destruction of many beings, and yet he became a great realized being, a saint, because he found and followed the right guru, and through his guidance overcame past negative accumulations and became purified.

We then learn from Milarepa's life that, in order to remove not only the negative karma of this lifetime but all that we have accumulated throughout past lifetimes, we need to have determination, perseverance, and diligence in removing faults. Milarepa learned the importance of persistence and diligence in following the teacher's directions, and the importance of developing deep devotion for the guru.



**M**ilarepa's life was also an example of the rewards of devotion to the practice. He never gave up, he never surrendered, he kept on practicing with a kind of determination and enthusiasm that is necessary to actually get rid of negative karma. Then finally he showed that, if one develops all those qualities, meeting the right guru, having devotion and perseverance, without giving up, it leads to the positive result of realization; it is not simply a waste of one's self or energy or time. Through his practice Milarepa achieved realization, performed miracles, and eventually became the strongest person, comparable to a diamond. By following and staying on the path to enlightenment, he reached the complete fruition of his goal. This is a symbolic example for us all.



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

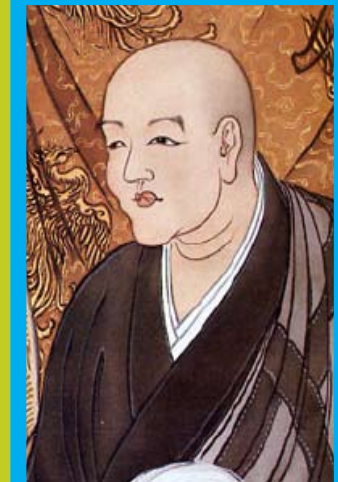
*The pictures shown here are available for free  
downloading from [namsebangdzo.com](http://namsebangdzo.com)*



## DOGEN'S FUKANZAZENGI

*Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen  
from the Soto Zen Text Project, Stanford University*

This pivotal Zen text, written in 1227 by Eihei Dogen, the Japanese monk who brought Zen from China to Japan, was one of the first pieces he wrote when he returned from China. It opens with an introduction which answers the question that led him to go to China. That question: if we are originally endowed with the Buddha nature, why is it been necessary for us to seek enlightenment or even to engage in spiritual practice?



**Learn to  
take the  
backward  
step that  
turns the  
light and  
shines it  
inward.**

The Way is originally perfect and all-pervading. How could it be contingent on practice and realization? The true vehicle is self-sufficient. What need is there for special effort? Indeed, the whole body is free from dust. Who could believe in a means to brush it clean? It is never apart from this very place; what is the use of traveling around to practice? And yet, if there is a hairsbreadth deviation, it is like the gap between heaven and earth. If the least like or dislike arises, the mind is lost in confusion. Suppose you are confident in your understanding and rich in enlightenment, gaining the wisdom that knows at a glance, attaining the Way and clarifying the mind, arousing an aspiration to reach for the heavens. You are playing in the entranceway, but you are still are short of the vital path of emancipation.

Consider the Buddha: although he was wise at birth, the traces of his six years of upright sitting can yet be seen. As for Bodhidharma, although he had received the mind-seal, his nine years of facing a wall is celebrated still. If even the ancient sages were like this, how can we today dispense with wholehearted practice?

Therefore, put aside the intellectual practice of investigating words and chasing phrases, and learn to take the backward step that turns the light and shines it inward. Body and mind of themselves will drop away, and your original face will manifest. If you want to realize such, get to work on such right now.

For practicing Zen, a quiet room is suitable. Eat and drink moderately. Put aside all involvements and suspend all affairs. Do not think "good" or "bad." Do not judge true or false. Give up the operations of mind, intellect, and consciousness; stop measuring with thoughts, ideas, and views. Have no designs on becoming a Buddha. How could that be limited to sitting or lying down?



At your sitting place, spread out a thick mat and put a cushion on it. Sit either in the full-lotus or half-lotus position. In the full-lotus position, first place your right foot on your left thigh, then your left foot on your right thigh. In the half-lotus, simply place your left foot on your right thigh. Tie your robes loosely and arrange them neatly. Then place your right hand on your left leg and your left hand on your right palm, thumb-tips lightly touching. Straighten your body and sit upright, leaning neither left nor right, neither forward nor backward. Align your ears with your shoulders and your nose with your navel. Rest the tip of your tongue against the front of the roof of your mouth, with teeth together and lips shut. Always keep your eyes open, and breathe softly through your nose.

Once you have adjusted your posture, take a breath and exhale fully, rock your body right and left, and settle into steady, immovable sitting. Think of not thinking. Not thinking. What kind of thinking is that? Nonthinking. This is the essential art of zazen.

The zazen I speak of is not meditation practice. It is simply the dharma gate of joyful ease, the practice-realization of totally culminated enlightenment. It is the koan realized; traps and snares can never reach it. If you grasp the point, you are like a dragon gaining the water, like a tiger taking to the mountains. For you must know that the true dharma appears of itself, so that from the start dullness and distraction are struck aside.

When you arise from sitting, move slowly and quietly, calmly and deliberately. Do not rise suddenly or abruptly. In surveying the past, we find that transcendence of both mundane and sacred and dying while either sitting or standing have all depended entirely on the power of zazen.

In addition, triggering awakening with a finger, a banner, a needle, or a mallet, and effecting realization with a whisk, a fist, a staff, or a shout. These cannot be understood by discriminative thinking; much less can they be known through the practice of supernatural power. They must represent conduct beyond seeing and hearing. Are they not a standard prior to knowledge and views?

This being the case, intelligence or lack of it is not an issue; make no distinction between the dull and the sharp-witted. If you concentrate your effort single-mindedly, that in itself is wholeheartedly engaging the way. Practice-realization is naturally undefiled. Going forward is, after all, an everyday affair.

In general, in our world and others, in both India and China, all equally hold the Buddha-seal. While each lineage expresses its own style, they are all simply devoted to sitting, totally blocked in resolute stability. Although they say that there are ten thousand distinctions and a thousand variations, they just wholeheartedly engage the way in zazen. Why leave behind the seat in your own home to wander in vain through the dusty realms of other lands? If you make one misstep, you stumble past what is directly in front of you.

You have gained the pivotal opportunity of human form. Do not pass your days and nights in vain. You are taking care of the essential activity of the Buddha way. Who would take wasteful delight in the spark from a flintstone? Besides, form and substance are like the dew on the grass, the fortunes of life like a dart of lightning-emptied in an instant, vanished in a flash.

Please, honored followers of Zen, long accustomed to groping for the elephant, do not doubt the true dragon. Devote your energies to the way of direct pointing at the real. Revere the one who has gone beyond learning and is free from effort. Accord with the enlightenment of all the Buddhas; succeed to the samadhi of all the ancestors. Continue to live in such a way, and you will be such a person. The treasure store will open of itself, and you may enjoy it freely.

**The zazen I speak of is not meditation practice. It is simply the dharma gate of joyful ease.**



# In Other Words...

A SKILLFUL MEANS EXERCISE BY EDITOR XIANYANG CARL JEROME

AFTER STUDYING THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS, STUDENTS IN DHARMA CLASSES AT OUR MONASTERY (THE MID-AMERICAN BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION) IN ST. LOUIS AND AT ENLIGHTENMENT TEMPLE IN CHICAGO WERE ASKED TO SUMMARIZE THIS TEACHING IN TWO WORDS--A HANDY PHRASE THAT COULD KEEP THEM FOCUSED ON LIFE AS A LIVING PRACTICE OF THE DHARMA. CRIES ALWAYS AROSE: CAN I USE FOUR OR FIVE WORDS. YES. WHAT ABOUT A SENTENCE OR TWO? HMMM.

BODHIDHARMA'S PHRASE, "SUFFER INJUSTICE," WAS GIVEN AS AN EXAMPLE. HERE ARE SOME OF THEIR RESPONSES:



ADD NOTHING

DON'T MAKE IT WORSE

SEEK NOTHING

LEAVE NO TAINT

HAVE FEW WANTS

GIVE SELFLESSLY

WANT NOTHING

NO EXPECTATIONS

LEAVE NOTHING BEHIND

IT'S JUST THIS MUCH

NO PREFERENCES

## Matsuoka-roshi on Zen Meditation



Unfortunately, many sincere people who begin meditation later discard it because they see no miraculous results. They like to see definite results of the time they have spent in meditation. Some expect enlightenment to descend upon them like a sudden storm. They do not realize that enlightenment is more like a gentle rain. On a spring day, you may look out the window and realize that it has been quietly raining for some time. The world outside has been silently watered by the falling rain, while you were unaware of it. When you sit in Zen meditation, the rain begins to fall without your notice, and you will have already entered into the enlightened world. Gradually, you will become aware of the benefits of meditation for your life, if you look back over a period of time.

However, you should not seek these benefits each time you sit in meditation. If you seek benefits from it, it will be as if you are seeking bright jewels to adorn yourself with. If you do this, you will be led farther away from the spiritual world of the Buddha. If you seek bright jewels for your spirit, you will only be secretly admiring yourself. Instead, continue to sit in meditation, forgetting who is sitting, and let the gentle rain of the Buddha fall upon you.



*Rev. Soyu Matsuoka(1912-1997) is considered pivotal in propagating the dharma in America. He established the Chicago Zen Center, and the Zen Center of Long Beach (Zen Buddhist Temple), as well as Zen centers in Detroit, Atlanta, and Phoenix.*

# THE ABHIDHARMAS

*The abhidharma is a systematic classification, presentation and delineation of Buddhist psychology and philosophy, developed and written many centuries after the Buddha's death—in the Theravada tradition, some three or more centuries later, in the Mahayana tradition, eight or more centuries later. Here Xianyang Carl Jerome looks at three key abhidharma texts for those who want to venture down this most profound path.*

If we see the fundamental orientation of the Buddhadharma as a way of addressing the issues of spiritual development, then the abhidharma can be viewed as a valuable tool for understanding the mind, breaking it down into its constituent parts and their functions so that we can better understand how the mind operates in support of, as well as in hindrance of, our practice. This is “heavy stuff,” as one student said recently. Indeed, this is Buddhism on its most philosophically complex level.

In many traditions, study of the abhidharma is not allowed or not recommended until one has attained a deep level of practice, so tread gently in this realm and remember that the abhidharma is here to support our practice on the cushion, not to replace it.

In the painting above, Asanga is portrayed receiving the teachings from Maitreya Buddha in the *tushita* heaven and transmitting them to his brother, Vasubandhu. Asanga and Vasubandhu are founders of the Yogachara school which would evolve into Chan and Zen.



For those who have a reached a level of practice where the abhidharma would be of benefit, one needs to understand that there are not one but two abhidharmas: the Theravada abhidharma and the Mahayana abhidharma. For a variety of reasons, most of the accessible abhidharma literature in English has been from the Theravada tradition. A recent addition to that body of literature, and one that should be in any serious

abhidharma library, is the American scholar-monk Bhikkhu Bodhi's *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidharma*, which is organizationally, commentarily, and linguistically accessible in ways that many of the texts in this field are not.

Here we will be focusing on three early texts—one by Asanga and two by his brother, Vasubandhu. These are original or primary source abhidharma writings. The *Abhidharmasamuccaya* is Asanga's, and the *Abhidharmakosabhasyam*, which is four volumes, is Vasubandhu's along with the *Ch'eng Wei-Shih Lun*, which is Vasubandhu's Treatise in Thirty Verses with a vast commentary by Tripitaka Master Hsuan-Tsang. All are “rare books” and are expensive, ranging in price from \$75

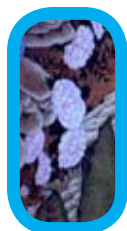


for Asanga's book to about \$300 each for the Vasubandhu titles. All can be purchased online with relative ease, though some patience is necessary as delivery time may be several weeks or even several months. They are also available through public libraries' inter-library loan programs and at major university libraries.

### ***Asanga, Vasubandhu, and Hsuan-Tsang:***

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Asanga, along with his brother Vasubandhu, founded the Yogacara or Consciousness-Only School, the school from which Chan (Zen) would arise. Both were monks of great intellect and profound practice. Legend has it that the teachings of the Consciousness-Only School were transmitted to Asanga from the Bodhisattva Maitreya and that Asanga then transmitted them to his brother Vasubandhu, who after converting from Theravada to Mahayana spread them throughout India. The Consciousness-Only School gained prominence in China primarily because of the teaching and translation efforts of Tripitaka Master Hsuan-Tsang (596-664).

In the Consciousness-Only school, everything is created from the mind and as such is Consciousness-Only. Everything from birth to death, even nirvana, arises from consciousness. Consciousness-Only doctrine is therefore characterized by an extensive analysis of the characteristics of the mind, for if we can distinguish what is real from what is unreal, if we can distinguish what is discriminating-mind and not mistake it for our originally clear, pure mind then it is assumed we can quickly move from the former to the latter in our practice.



***Abhidharmasamuccaya,  
The Compendium of Higher  
Philosophy By Asanga***  
*Translated from the Chinese into  
French and annotated by Sri  
Lankan scholar monk Walpola  
Rahula, and translated from the  
French into English by  
Sara Boin-Webb.*

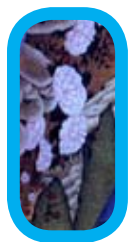
The *Abhidharmasamuccaya* holds a position of very great esteem in Mahayana literature. In its 300 pages it contains nearly all of the principal

doctrines of the Mahayana while also being a compendium of many of the other works of Asanga. The text contains two parts: the collection of characteristics in four chapters, and the collection of explanations in another four chapters. Here is a sample of the text from the beginning of Chapter One, which is typical of the language and structure of the book:

*Why are there only five aggregates? Because of the five methods by means of which the idea of self makes its appearance: self as physical apprehension, self as experience, self as expression, self as the agent of all right and all wrong, and self as the basis of all that.*

Having first established that there are five aggregates, Asanga explains why there are only five (as we see above) and then proceeds to examine them on progressively deeper and deeper levels of philosophic delineation.

The *Abhidharmasamuccaya* is a good starting point for a primary source study of the Mahayana abhidharma.



***Abhidharmakosabhāsyam  
By Vasubandhu.***  
*Translated into French by the late  
19<sup>th</sup> century Belgian scholar Louis  
de La Vallée Poussin and from the  
French into English by Buddhistologist  
t Leo M. Pruden (four volumes)*

This 1600-page compendium of Indian Buddhist philosophy and psychology is often described as the most important writing in the Theravada abhidharma literature (it was before Vasubandhu's conversion to the Mahayana). It begins with a history of abhidharma literature and covers subjects such as Buddhist cosmology, the process of rebirth and karma, the Buddhist ethical theory, mental defilements, causes of suffering and the path to enlightenment, a taxonomy of meditative states, and a refutation of the existence of soul, to mention just a few of the subjects examined here.

It is vast in scope and detail, yet some of this compendium is relatively easy to understand, such as this explanation of conditioned things:



*A conditioned thing does not exist beyond the acquisition of its being; it perishes on the spot where it arises; it cannot go from this spot to another.*

But the exegesis of this sentence, which discusses the nature of cause and effect in relation to destruction, is somewhat more complex. On the other hand, some of the abhidharma here, such as Chapter Five, a hundred pages analyzing the latent defilements (results of karmic actions that have not yet been manifest), requires virtual fluency in Pali to make it approachable and near sainthood to make it understandable.

**While the presentation of the abhidharma here may at times seem theoretical and remote, it is always, in fact, praxis; it is always meant to bring us back to the “how-to,” the application of these ideas to ending our suffering.** This is, from one perspective, an absolute and total analysis of karma; not for the sake of presenting a philosophic explanation, but so that we can better understand the process that hinders us from ending our karma, from finally ending our suffering.



*Ch'eng Wei-Shih Lun, Doctrine of Mere-Consciousness By Tripitaka-Master Hsuan Tsang.*

*Translated from the Chinese into English by Wei Tat. Foreword by Venerable Yin Shun (in Chinese, not translated)*

To start, this is an 800-page commentary by Tripitaka-Master Hsuan Tsang of Vasubandhu's *Vijnaptimatratatrimika, Treatise in Thirty Verses*, the commentary and treatise translated by Wei Tat, a leading Chinese metaphysician who spent twenty years of his life translating this seminal Mahayana text. The original Chinese is presented on the left-hand pages, the English translation on the facing right-hand pages. The *Thirty Verses* take only 16 of the pages (eight in Chinese and eight in English); the remaining 782 pages are Master Hsuan Tsang's synthesis of the commentaries available to him on the treatise and his own interpretations and notes.

This profound work in the field of Buddhist phenomenology sums up the essentials of

the Yogacara school. **In its broadest sense, it is a depiction of the human mind that differentiates reality from illusion.** This book explores, in explicit abhidharma terms, the eight-consciousnesses of the Yogacara school, then explains the Yogacara Three-Nature Theory, and concludes with the five-step path to enlightenment. The point is not to be philosophic, but to provide an understanding to be used for the overturning the consciousness and thus for reaching the other shore. The first line of the first stanza reads

*Concepts of Atman and dharmas do not imply the existence of a real Atman and real dharma, but are merely fictitious constructions produced by numerous causes*

and the commentary on that begins with

*Why is it impossible to establish the existence of a real Atman?*

and then proceeds to answer the question over the next seven pages.

Of the three primary source texts reviewed here, this seems to be the most accessible.

*With or without an abhidharma text at our side, may we always practice for the attainment of no self.*



# DHARMA IN THE MOMENT



It rains hard on a covered thing.  
It doesn't rain hard on an open thing.

*Thai Master Luangpor Teean*



Silence is better than holiness, so opening your mouth is a big mistake. But if you use this mistake to save all beings, this is Zen.

*Korean Master Seung Sahn*



Your trouble is that you're not very real, are you?

*Zen Priest Philip Whalen*



The most important thing is to find out what is the most important thing.

*Shunryu Suzuki, founder, San Francisco Zen Center*



"Meditation is about dissolving our fixation on ourselves, on the process of meditating, and on any result we might gain from it. Through meditation we begin to get the hang of living with a non-grasping attitude. "

*Tibetan Teacher Pema Chodron*

**MABA**  
**The Mid-America**  
**Buddhist Association**



**M**ABA is a Chan Buddhist monastery located on 60-acres of secluded woodland in the rolling hills of Missouri, about 45 minutes west of St. Louis. The monastery includes a meditation hall with a library and communal dining area. In addition, there is a nun's residence, a "Tea House," a guest residence, a Guan Yin Pavilion and Dizang Memorial Hall.

With the guidance and leadership of its Abbot, Master Ji Ru, MABA has developed programs that include weekly meditation and Dharma talks, as well as periodic one, three, and fourteen-day retreats. Retreats are led by Master Ji Ru or other experienced Buddhist teachers. There are also weekly classes in Buddhist studies for beginners, intermediate, and advanced students, as well as a summer program for youth. And for those seeking a private retreat, whether a weekend, a week, or more, MABA can provide accommodations and a quiet practice environment.

Rightview Quarterly and Rightview Online are important components of MABA's practice and mission.

We invite you to visit MABA and to subscribe to Rightview Quarterly. You can participate online in your practice or learn about Buddhism at [RightviewOnline.org](http://RightviewOnline.org).

For more information about any of our practices or programs please email [info@maba-usa.org](mailto:info@maba-usa.org)

For information about Rightview Quarterly or RightviewOnline please email [editor@RightviewOnline.org](mailto:editor@RightviewOnline.org)



## DIZANG HALL

**A final  
resting place for  
your loved ones**



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

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

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

**For information please contact  
Venerable Kungshih at  
(636) 482-4037**

**or go to MABA's website: [www.maba-usa.org](http://www.maba-usa.org)**



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