



Breath on a Window



UNIBUDS Annual Magazine 2009



Theme Introduction



Breath on a Window



UNITIBUDS Annual Magazine 2009

Impermanance

Breath on a window

As the warm air from our body touches the window pane, it quickly condenses into a white patch of tiny water droplets; and within minutes, these water droplets evaporate, leaving no trace of their prior existence. Just like the leaves in spring will eventually fall off in the month of autumn, this phenomenon reflects the larger reality of life, that everything around us is in constant change and never stay the same. In Buddhism, this phenomenon is described as "Impermanence".

Impermanence, also known as *Anicca* in Pali, describes the universal phenomena that everything around us is in a state of constant flux. This includes things in our physical world, our body, our thoughts, our feelings as well as our relationship with others. The reason for this phenomenon is explained by the interdependence of all things; that for any event to occur, it requires the coming together of various causes and conditions. Take our physical world for example, everything in our physical world is made up of tiny particles (called atoms) that are in constant motion. A cup is what we perceive it to be because these atoms congregate in a particular way (causes) at room temperature (conditions). And when it is placed under extreme heat, it is no longer a cup as the causes and conditions have changed. And if we pay enough attention to our thoughts and feelings we will also realize that they change according to situations (causes and conditions) that we are exposed to at that point in time.

Unfortunately, impermanence is often viewed with pessimism, as it suggests the notion that all good things must come to an end. However, impermanence itself is neither positive nor negative. It just describes the law of nature. It is our perception of how impermanence is that determines it's positive or negative association. Although it may be sad that the leaves in spring will eventually fall off in the month of autumn, these fallen leaves will then disintegrate and provide nutrients for new leaves to grow in the next spring. Similarly, when we like something, we wish it to stay the same. And when it eventually changes we experience pain and suffering. On the other hand, when we dislike something, we wish it to change. And when it finally does we experience joy and happiness.

When seen in the right light, impermanence may suggest endless possibilities. As things change according to the causes and conditions at that point in time, our actions in the present moment determines our future. Understanding impermanence may also allow us to let go of things or people more easily when the time comes for us to part, therefore allowing us our peace of mind.

As you flip through the pages of this magazine, may you understand the nature of impermanence, and may this understanding bring you more peace and happiness in your life.



Acknowledgements

This magazine is the collective effort of many whose dedication, effort, and patience help made this production a work of art. The editor wishes to express her deepest gratitude for your commitment to quality as well as the understanding of the need to stay true to the Dhamma. Whatever good merits that we have done, may they shared by all. Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu...

Note: Where appropriate, names are listed in alphabetical order according to the last name.

Editor
Kate Yi Zhang

Assistant Editor
Kia Sheng Chew

Layout designer
Shi Ying Ooi

Cover Illustration
Suhendry Ui

Photo Section Layout
Lucky Jeong

Editorial team/ Transcription
Amy Chung, Ian Xiang Yuan Ch'ng, Henry Makgawinata,
Khai Yi Ng, Patrick Tang & Ming De Teh

Editorial team/ Contribution
Joffre Balce, Vickey Chen, Tina Ng, Dr Keith Ong, Lillian
Ong, Alex Serpo, & Pojdanai Sukijjakhamin

Editorial team/ Editing
Chien Hoong Gooi, Milani Ho, Linus Meng, Tina Ng, Alex
Serpo & Puay Yeong Teh.

Editorial Illustration
Linus Meng

Photo Contributors
Bernard Chen, Lucky Jeong, Cheng Hiang Lee, Shi Ying
Ooi, Eric Lam & Lim Cheng Tuck.

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UNSW Buddhist Society
Religious Centre
University of New South Wales
Sydney NSW 2052

T: +61 (02) 9385 6082
E: unibuds@yahoo.com
H: www.unibuds.unsw.edu.au



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Editor's Note

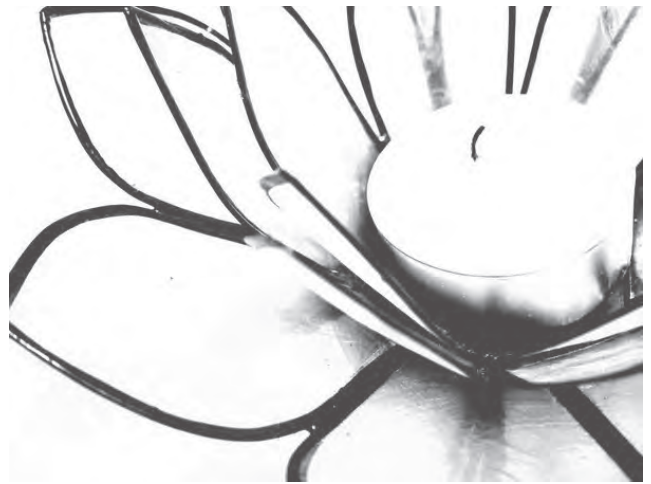
Dear readers,

A warm welcome to the 29th edition of UNIBUDS' Annual Magazine "Breath on a Window". Through this magazine, we hope to bring across to you one of the central Buddhist teaching – Impermanence.

As explained in the theme introduction, impermanence describes the universal phenomenon that all things -- be it physical objects, mental or emotional states -- change with time. Some are more easily understood, for example, the fleeting nature of the weather and the rising and setting of the sun and moon; while others are more subtle, such as the transient nature of our thoughts and emotions. What ultimately improves our quality of life, however, is when we have put the understanding of this concept into our daily practice.

To speak for myself, I have been reminded on the importance of that last statement just recently. In the last couple of months a number of events have tested my ability to "walk the talk". A few close friends left Sydney for good and the laptop that has been part and parcel of helping me get through life died during an electrical surge a few weeks before this magazine was due to be published. Despite the understanding that I had, my initial response was grief and distress. It was only after the emotions have subsided did I have the clarity to see that these events were examples of the impermanent nature of life.

This magazine hopes to portray impermanence through all its perspectives – its cause, its manifestations, and its relevance to our daily lives. It is a compilation of the words of wisdom from our weekly Dhamma Talk speakers as well as the sharing of experience and insights



from our member contributors. As you flip through the pages, I hope that you will not only gain knowledge and understanding of the theory of impermanence, but also reflect and contemplate on the events of your own life, and putting the acquired insight into practice.

The Dhamma Insights section begins with an overview of Buddhism by Mr Chien Hoong Gooi in "What is Buddhism?" It is soon followed by Venerable Neng Rong's detailed exposition on the cause and advice on making the most of impermanence in "Finding Happiness in Impermanence". Mr Rod Lee and Sister Khanh Van Le followed on to discuss the practical application of impermanence in "Good times, Bad times" and "Right and Wrong, any other way?" It finally finishes off with the enlightening articles by Venerable Neng Rong in "The Dependent Origination of Life" and Mr Jim Teoh in "The Way Leading to Nibbana".


The member's contribution section contains a collection of poems, short story and reflective pieces from current and senior UNIBUDS members. And there is also a photo gallery where the golden moments in the events of UNIBUDS in the last year were captured and collated.

Where the talk was given in Chinese, we have provided the English translation, and all transcriptions and translations have been approved by the respective speakers. Whilst much care and effort have been made to ensure the accuracy of the material, we apologize in advance for any inaccuracy or misinterpretation in this magazine.

Last but not least, I hope reading this magazine will be an enjoyable and enlightening experience for all of you!

Yours in Dhamma,
Kate Yi Zhang
Annual Magazine Editor
2008-2009





*Everything changes, from
second to second
minute to minute
day to day
lifetime to lifetime*
---Path to Peace

Messages

Time flies, within a blink of the eye, it has been 29 years since Unibuds was born. During these 29 years, Unibuds has gone through peaks and ebbs. It is like the water in the river, which is sometimes high and strong, but sometimes quiet and slow. However, the water continues to flow. Isn't this the same as what happens to our life? Favourable and unfavourable conditions come and go, and then new matters arise again. Everything is impermanent and in the process of changing; there is no moment of rest. Impermanence is a universal law. It is a phenomenon that we cannot avoid in our life. However, not many people seem to understand the truth of it. Thus, Unibuds has chosen "It comes, it stays, it goes – what is forever?" as the theme of Bodhi Nite this year, and also "Impermanence – Breath on the Window" as the theme of the Annual Magazine, to remind everyone that impermanence is always around us. So let's be more observant, and may everyone gain a deeper understanding on the truth of impermanence.

Some people feel that since everything is impermanent and nothing stays, what is the point of us working hard? In fact, it is because of impermanence that our hard work can be paid off. If nothing can be changed, then our effort is a real waste! Everything comes, stays for a while, then changes and goes because it exists due to a combination of many causes and conditions. It is dependent originated. As conditions change, the event or phenomenon will also change accordingly. However, the change need not necessarily be bad, it may also change for the better. If we can understand this principle, we will have hope. We must understand the teaching of cause and effect and cultivate right causes and conditions accordingly, and over time we will be able to direct ourselves in the direction that we want and create a brighter future for ourselves.

There are also people who feel that it is good that impermanence brings hope. However, whatever I have will sooner or later vanishes, this is still a great suffering! So, is impermanence the cause of our suffering?

All events and phenomena in the world are subject to change. However, does every change affect our emotion? When another person's car is crashed, we are indifferent, but when our car is scratched, we are very upset. Both are cars and both are affected by the phenomena of impermanence, but why do we have feeling for one and not for other? The problem is created when we link a thing or phenomenon to ourselves, any changes that happen to this thing will touch our heart and stir up our emotion. If we do not link the phenomenon with ourselves, the phenomenon is just a phenomenon, it does not affect us.

Thus, in order to relieve ourselves from suffering, we need to understand the truth of ourselves and the external phenomena. We have to reflect and contemplate on our body and mind and understand that we are a combination of physical and mental factors. We do not have a real and unchangeable self-nature. However, we always misunderstand this body and mind as a real 'I' and develop a strong sense of self-centredness. We see everything from our self-perspective, we are very self-defensive and always want more things to be our belongings. Hence, greed, hatred, delusion, arrogance, suspicions, and jeal-

Patron's Message

Impermanence

by Venerable Tsang Hui



ousy arise. In addition, we also do not understand the truth of external objects. We do not understand that they are also conditional and ever-changing, they are not permanent. We attach and cling onto whatever we encounter and hope that they always stay at the best states that we want them to be. But this is impossible, and hence, suffering arises.

When we see a thing/phenomenon, we always thought that it arises, then, it ceases. However, if we contemplate further, we will realise that there is in fact no real rising nor falling. When causes and conditions come together, we say that a thing/phenomenon arises. In fact, causes and conditions are constantly in the process of changing and restructuring. When the causes and conditions become very different to the initial causes and conditions, the appearance of the thing/phenomenon will differ greatly to its initial outlook. At this time, we thought that the initial thing/phenomenon has disappeared or ceased. In reality, there is no real thing/phenomenon that arises or ceases. The reason why we think something has arisen and ceased is because we are deluded by the appearance of its temporary stable state. We cling on to the temporary stable state as a real entity that is permanent. When the appearance of this state changes, we think that the thing has gone. We do not understand that all phenomena, including this body and mind that we cling onto as 'I' are dependent originated, they arise due to causes and conditions and are always in the process of changing. There is no such thing as an entity that has a permanent self-identity and self-nature. In Buddhism, we name phenomena as such as 'non-self' or 'self-less'.

Since there is no real self (non-self), there is no real entity that is unchangeable, then, what is rising and fall-

ing? Where am "I"? Who is attaching to things? Where are the things that we can attach to? Thus, it is not impermanence that brings us suffering. It is our ignorance and attachment that lead us to frustrations. In order to disentangle ourselves from suffering and frustration, we need to develop wisdom. We need to contemplate the truth of impermanence, non-self and dependent origination through the phenomena that is rising and falling. It is by breaking through our self-attachment and ignorance that we can attain liberation and real freedom.

Impermanence is a very important concept in Buddhism. It brings us hope of improvement and liberation. It is hoped that everyone can bear in mind the teaching of impermanence, value every opportunity that one has to listen, contemplate and practise the dharma, understand the rising and falling of all phenomena and go in depth into realising the truth of no rising nor falling, hence, developing real wisdom. Last but not least, may everyone initiate your bodhi mind, benefiting oneself and others, treasure the ground of learning Buddhism at Unibuds, give Unibuds your support and encouragement, so that it can continue to grow and flourish in the flow of impermanence, become better year after year, and continue to spread and share the Dhamma with more people on the campus.

導師的話



上藏下慧法師

時光如白駒過隙，轉瞬間，慧命社已渡過了廿九年。在這期間，它經歷過高潮，也遇過低潮，如江河之水，時而浩浩蕩蕩，時而涓涓而流，但總是不斷的流去。我們的生活又何嘗不是如此呢？順境與逆境，來了又去，然後新的又生起，一切不斷在無常流變中，沒有時刻的停留。無常是宇宙的自然法則，是我們生活中不可避免的現象，但卻鮮少人真正掌握其真義。因此，繼菩提之夜之主題——“生住異滅——甚麼是永恆？”慧命社年刊編委再以“無常——窗戶上的熱氣”為論題，提醒大家無常就在我們的周遭，盼大家多用心觀察，深入體會無常的真理。

有人覺得，一切一直在無常中流逝，我們的努力有甚麼用呢？其實，就因為它是無常、可變的，我們的努力才有用。否則怎麼努力都不能改變，那才是白費氣力！事情之所以會生起，暫住，變異，消滅，是因為它是許多條件組合而成的，是緣起的。條件不斷的在變動中，所以事情的呈現也隨之改變。但這個改變不一定是變壞，它亦可能變得更好。明白這個道理，我們就有希望。我們要記得因果法則，

隨順無常的變動，提供正確的因緣條件，使它朝向我們要的方向去改變，創造美好的未來。

也有人認為，無常帶來希望，那是很好。但是，我所得到的又會失去，那是很痛苦的。那麼，是無常帶給我們苦惱嗎？

世間所有的事情與現象都會變，是不是每一件事情的變化都會影響我們的情緒呢？別人的車子被撞壞了，我們沒有感覺。但我們心愛的車子被刮花了，我們很難過。同樣是車，同樣是無常的現象，為甚麼我們對一輛有感覺，對另一輛沒有感受呢？問題在於，當我們把我與一件事情或現象連繫在一起時，這事情的任何變動就會牽動我們的心，使我們的情緒跟著起波動。如果我們不把事情或現象與自己牽在一起，現象只是現象，它不影響我們。

因此，要解除苦惱，我們必須透視自我以及外在事物的真相。仔細觀察自我身心，它是物質與精神的和合體，並沒有實在不變的自性。但我們總是錯把它當作實在的我，產生強烈的自我意識，甚麼事情都從自我出發，處處保護自己，樣樣都希望成為我所有，進而產生貪、瞋、癡、慢、疑、嫉妒等種種煩惱。此外，我們對外在的一切也不了解，看不清楚它是條件性的，變動性，不是固定不變的，遇到甚麼都貪染不已，希望它永遠保持在我們喜歡的狀態，但這是不可能的，結果苦惱重重。

我們看到東西，總覺得它生起，滅了。其實，深一層的觀察，也沒有真正的生與滅。因緣和合產生一個現象，我們就說是它生起。在條件的流動與替代過程中，當它的條件與原來的條件差距多了，所呈現的現象與原來變得很不同，我們就以為原來的現象不見了，滅了。事實上，並沒有一個真正的東西在生與滅。我們之所以認為一件東西生起了、滅了，都是因為我們被它暫時穩定的表相所迷惑，把它當作實在的東西。當這暫時的表相變得很不同時，我們就以為它滅去了。我們不了解一切存在物，包括我們熱愛的這個‘我’，都是緣起的，條件性、變動性，並沒有固定的自體與自性，佛家稱此現象為無我。

既然無我，沒有實在不變的一個東西，那麼，又有甚麼東西在生與滅呢？我在那里？誰在執著？有甚麼東西可以執著呢？因此，不是無常觸惱我們，是我們的無明與執著給自己帶來苦惱！要解除痛苦與束縛，必須啟發智慧，我們要從生、住、異、滅的過程中透視無常、無我、緣起的道理，破除自我的染著與無明，才有解脫自在的可能。

無常是學佛中很重要的一個命題，它帶給我們進步與解脫的可能。願大家緊記無常，掌握當下的每個一時刻，聽聞、思惟、修學佛法，從生滅無常的事相，進一步透視不生不滅的真理，啟發真實智慧。更希望大家發菩提心，自利利他，珍惜慧命社這塊學佛的園地，給他您的幫助與鼓勵，讓它在生住異滅的過程中不斷前進，一年比一年進步，持續的在校園與更多的同學分享佛法。



Patron's Message

Impermanence

by Venerable Chao Khun Samai



Whether the Lord Buddha exists or not, three things always appear on earth: Anicca (impermanence), Dukkha (suffering) and Anatta (non-self), known as the three characteristics in Buddhism. But the Lord Buddha was the one who realised these truths, laid it down as a rule of everything and made it known to many people.

Looking back to our own life, impermanence shows itself since the day of our conception. It develops itself into five different parts of the body until we will be born into this world. From then on the impermanence shows itself to everybody. From childhood it leads to adulthood, from adulthood to old age and death. Just to remind us of what is so important, in every morning and every evening, we start our chanting by praying homage to the Triple Gems, the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha and then we chant the praises of their virtues, followed by our daily chanting of the recollections of old age, sickness and death. Just after good meditation we would share the merit and spread our loving-kindness to all living beings.

In spite of the fact that the truth of impermanence is very well known, only the Lord Buddha had taught who is impermanent and who is not. As we are cycling in the Samsara, old age, sickness and death are the most powerful forces that are crushing our well-being in every life.

Through morality, meditation and wisdom, we would come to realise that who would stay behind and who would have to move on. Usually the knowing mind would

do the travelling. If he is wise he would have a good company. If he is stupid he would have a bad company. As a human being, no matter how strong and healthy we are, when the time comes all four elements would come to say good bye to us at the grave yard. The knowing mind together with good and bad provisions would move on and continue its long journey.

Without morality as a base and meditation as a foundation, wisdom would never dawn upon us. Just to realise the impermanence, the suffering and the non-self and let go all of them would be impossible. Looking through the window on certain days we would see a clear sky with a vast empty space as a background. If we have a clean sight, we would see some dust particles dancing along. An empty space never dances but a dust particle does, from time to time.

In the endless Samsara, the cycle of birth and death, there is an inn in every birth. Normally, the host looks after the place. From time to time the guests pass by and ask to stay. If the host is not wise the guests might take over. In Buddhism, the Lord Buddha said that defilement is the guest and the knowing mind is the host. Whoever looks after the guest, the impermanence is unstable and would run into great suffering. Whoever looks after the permanent one would run into immortality.

May all living beings be well and happy.





President's Message

by Khai Yi Ng

Dear friends in Dhamma,

How have you been? I hope this Annual Magazine greets you with a smile on your face. Another year has passed, and the Annual Magazine team has put their hearts together to compile all of UNIBUDS' activities in the last year through this publication titled "Breath on a Window". Special thanks to the Annual Magazine Editor Kate Yi Zhang, and Assistant Kia Sheng Chew, as well as their editorial team for the hard work and effort put into accomplishing this annual publication. Sadhu!

The theme of the magazine is "Impermanence", which also coincides with our Bodhi Nite's theme this year. So have we all understood this Buddhist concept? Or have we already forgotten it? Everything around us rises and ceases due to causes and conditions as they follow the law of impermanence. We cannot seem to control the changes occurring around us, but we have the chance to create the conditions which may influence the outcome in a positive way. I am sure this publication will help us grasp the meaning of impermanence better.

With the publishing of this magazine, it marks the end of UNIBUDS' 29th year. As we flip through the pages, it refreshes our memory once again on all the activities that have been held throughout the year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Executive Committee, for making all the events a success. In every planning, organizing and executing process, they have given their best despite their own commitments in studies and work. Without them, UNIBUDS will not have run smoothly throughout the year.

On behalf of UNIBUDS, I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to our patrons, Venerable Tsang Hui and Venerable Chao Khun Samai for their guidance and full support. A ship will not sail towards the right destination without a compass; therefore, without their guidance, UNIBUDS will not be what it is today.

As one of the university students' society, we are grateful that UNIBUDS is well taken care of by the Student Development Department of UNSW as well as the Buddhist Chaplaincy. A million thanks to the Student Development Department and our Buddhist Chaplain Venerable Neng Rong, for their kind support and endless help.

Not forgetting our supportive members, without you, UNIBUDS would never have grown. We are honoured to have you as a part of us. We hope that the UNIBUDS family has provided you with many opportunities to learn the Dhamma as well as to build friendships. Amidst the laughs and fun we have had together, I hope that all



of us can continue to learn and practice the Dhamma in our daily life.

It is my pleasure to be able to serve UNIBUDS and every one of you. In many ways, UNIBUDS has given me the opportunity to learn and grow. My journey in UNIBUDS has been fruitful and memorable, and the practice of the Dhamma shaped me to become a better person both spiritually and emotionally. I look forward to the journey ahead, with more Dhamma learning and practicing in my own life.

Another year has come, I am sure UNIBUDS will face the challenges and opportunities with confidence and poise. With the new Executive Committee, I believe that it will be another exciting year for UNIBUDS. I hope that all of you will continue to support UNIBUDS to help provide the best conditions for the seeds to bloom in full.

May all beings be well and happy,
May all beings be free from suffering,
Whatever merits we have done,
May the merits be shared by all.

Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu!

With metta,
Khai Yi NG
President 2008/2009



“

With faith and confidence we tread
We, we move as one
Along the path of peacefulness
Open your eyes, live every moment
All of us walking together
O yes! Walking together
For the happiness of all

Come and join us
Let our hearts be our voices
Come, let us show you loving kindness
Forward and onward
Without fear on the right path
Forward and onward
Buddha my only faith ”





Messages from the 29th Executive Committee



 Mandy Pang 
External Vice President

Dear friends in Dhamma, How are everyone doing? Hope everyone have been well and happy! It has now come to an end of 29th Executive Committee term and this would be the last opportunity for me to greet you guys as an Exco.. Looking back, I had been in UNIBUDS for 4 years and I am really grateful to have known so many wonderful friends here. Not forgetting, having the opportunity to learn and experience the Dhamma. Once again, I would like to express my gratitude to all members for giving me this opportunity to serve you again as the External Vice President and am grateful for your support and effort in UNIBUDS. There may be changes to the people and to how things are run (isn't this what impermanence is?) yet I do hope you could continue to support us for the Dhamma.

May UNIBUDS continue to blossom and may this light of wisdom continue to pass down in many years to come. May all be well and happy always. Sadhu!



 Yee Herng Yeo 
Internal Vice President

How is your holidays going, my dhamma friends?! It is my honour to hold the position of Internal Vice President in UNIBUDS. Thanks to all my dhamma friends who have been there for UNIBUDS. It was a collective effort to create a success to all UNIBUDS events. UNIBUDS has boost my confidence and self esteem whereby I get to learn to manage things in systematic, efficient and most importantly in wisdom way! It is inevitable to deal with difficulties in life but dhamma has guided me to overcome them. Having the chance to practice dhamma with all of you is indeed very valuable and I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for that. It is

undeniable that all of the 29th executive members share the same thought too.

Besides, I am grateful to the friendship with all of you in this dhamma journey. I have been continuously showered with care, love and support by all of you. I will continue shouldering my responsibilities and will indeed perform better for this coming term. Last but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who contributed in UNIBUDS all this while.

Hope to see you around soon! :D



 Kia Sheng Chew (Jayson) 
Honorary Secretary

It comes, it stays and it goes. This year has been a fulfilling year for me as an exco in UNIBUDS. I wish to take this opportunity to thank everyone for the support and effort in UNIBUDS. It has been a wonderful experience for me to work as Honorary Secretary. I have learnt various interpersonal skills as well as gaining invaluable friendships along my year in UNIBUDS.

I sincerely hope that the light in UNIBUDS can be passed down and UNIBUDS continue to blossom!



 Kelly Wong 
Honorary Treasurer

I can't believe it is the end of the 29th Executive Committee term. This year has been an unforgettable year for me. I would like to say a big thank you to my dear EXCOs and members. Thanks everyone for accompanying me to learn, to laugh and have fun throughout this Dhamma journey.

Thanks again for your support towards Unibuds. I hope that all of you will have a happy and fulfilling year ahead.



Ian Ch'ng
General Secretary



Time does fly! It has been 1 year for me as an exco and I truly appreciate this chance. I would like to say that it is an honour to be an Exco, because this is a place that you can gain friendship, experience and also to enhance your Dhamma practice.

It's absolutely wonderful to be a General Secretary, not only to clean up and take care of the library, get a chance to be exposed to so many great Dhamma books, and also it's fun to buy different types of biscuits and refreshment for the weekly Chinese and English Dhamma Talks! Although I may have given some headaches to the President, I hope I have done a good job =p

The 29th Executive Committee term has come to an end. Things might change, but I hope the exco for the coming terms will still have the passion to pursue the Dhamma, and the determination to realise the truth within ourselves. May all sentient beings be well and happy.



Rosiana Lim
Activities Director



It feels like yesterday I was part of the Exco team. Time really seems ticking fast. It has been a fulfilling and wonderful journey with all the support of you - the loyal UNIBUDS members - and also the other 11 great ExcOs. The past two years have taught me a lot -- Dhamma, self-improvement, and friendship. There is nothing that I'd trade off for the experience I've gained. I do encourage everyone to take any opportunity at hands to grow spiritually in the Dhamma, and have it as your guidance in your life. Every part of our life could be our teacher, appreciate what we've had and let the heart (Dhamma) lead the way.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank YOU all for your ongoing support. May UNIBUDS always blossoms and spread the seeds of joy and happiness through the Dhamma to everyone. May everyone be well and happy. Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu!



Mei Ling Teoh
Meditation Coordinator



The year went past so quickly without me realizing it. It was a fun and an exciting journey being able to learn a lot and grow together with the other EXCOS as well as getting to know more members. Thanks for all your support towards UNIBUDS during the entire term and hopefully I will still be seeing the familiar faces in the coming new term. May all of you be well and happy.



Ming De Teh
English Dhamma Talk Coordinator



Dear friends in the Dhamma, welcome to a brand new year. Let us take this opportunity to refresh ourselves in the Dhamma, to reflect on our past unwholesome, wrongful actions, and set aspirations for the new year. Being in UNIBUDS has been a life changing experience for me, but do not take my word for it, come and see for yourself~! It was life changing because I was exposed to a teaching that was non-sectarian, that was compassionate, that was wise and that led people to happiness. It is these aspects of the Dhamma (teachings of the Buddha) that kept me going on in the committee. Signing off as the English Dhamma Talk coordinator, I am now happy to be the External Vice President of UNIBUDS, to assist in the activities of the society, and hope that other people share my joy.

I hope that all sentient beings can be happy no matter where they are. May all beings be well and happy, may all beings be free from enmity and suffering~!



Bernard Chen
Chinese Dhamma Talk Coordinator



As quickly a moment of time comes, it also goes away. Reflecting upon the year that has gone by, I realise how blessed I am to be surrounded by so many like-minded friends in the Dhamma. UNIBUDS is a melting pot of personalities, cultures and traditions but all with the single-minded faith and interest in the Dhamma. It is from this pot that I have learned and taken so much from so I was happy to be able to give back to as an EXCO. Impermanent are all conditional existences so I have realised, to cherish every moment, every breath and every experience, pleasant or unpleasant, for there is always a lesson to be learnt before it fades away again.

To everyone in UNIBUDS, may you have a wonderful 2010 and may the Dhamma illuminate your path ahead!



Shi Ying Ooi
SACCA Editor



One year and 4 editions later I am proud and glad to step down with the deepest gratitude to all of you who had made this journey possible. Sacca has gone through a significant change and I certainly do hope that it is for the better, bringing Dhamma, words and friendship closer to you and to capture memories that will soon fade away. Writers, contributors, designers and photographers--your efforts are much appreciated. It is an honour to have worked with all of you and inspiring to have 11 companions along this road, never give up on this learning journey and I hope to continue seeing all of you blossom in UNIBUDS.



Kate Yi Zhang
Annual Magazine Editor



With a blink of an eye, another year has passed and it is now my third and final time writing this message. Looking back at the last three years, I realized that I have shared three of the most significant years of my personal growth with the Society and Committee. Through the laughters and tears, happiness and heartache, UNIBUDS has always been an anchor for me, providing the guiding light whenever I am lost in the mist and fog of life. I am also thankful of the opportunities and friendships these three years of EXCOship have given me, without which life would have been much duller for sure. But it is now time for others to embark on this amazing journey, finding their own treasures along the way. I wish you all the best!

A sincere thank you to all that I have met in the last three years, my fellow EXCOs and members, you have taught me lessons big and small, to make me a stronger and better person. Also a sincere thank you to all who have supported UNIBUDS, please continue to do so! And always remember that UNIBUDS is build by you, and it is here for your growth and learning. I wish you all a very fulfilling year ahead, and may all of you grow in strength and wisdom!



Dhamma Insights



*If the causes we create arise from wisdom,
So then will the results.
If the causes we create arise from ignorance,
So then will the results.*

---Heart of the Buddha





What is Buddhism?

by Chien Hoong Gooi

When we think about the word "Buddhism", what is the first word or idea that pops into our mind? Meditation, mindfulness, Buddha, dharma, wisdom, karma, bodhi tree, lotus flower, rebirth, philosophy, emptiness... The list goes on and different people may have a different idea of what Buddhism is about. In order to understand what is at the core of Buddhism or Buddhist teachings, we must go back to where it all began, to the founder of all these teachings, the Buddha.

So who was the Buddha? Some may perceive him as a God-like being floating among the clouds, some may consider him as the deity that answers their prayers, while some refer to him as a great spiritual teacher.

From a historical perspective, the Buddha was a man who once walked this earth nearly 2600 years ago in present day northern India. What is so remarkable about this man is that he was an expert, a true scientist of nature. His expertise was in the nature of life, the nature of phenomena. He was a great being who knew the most intricate workings of nature and spent his life helping others to liberate themselves from the pain and suffering arising from a deep unknowing and misunderstanding of the true nature of life. He was one who was always very close to nature. Although he was born as a prince in a small kingdom in northern India, he died as a great teacher. From birth to death, all the important events in the Buddha's life occurred in nature; usually in the forest, under a tree and beneath the open skies.

Just before his birth into this world, his mother was traveling back to her hometown to give birth as was the Indian tradition. However, before reaching her destination, she gave birth to Prince Siddhartha while resting at a grand garden, Lumbini, in present day Nepal. A great many legends tell of his life as a prince and how he excelled in all fields, including literature, sports, politics and philosophy. As Prince Siddhartha grew older, he started coming across more scenes that made him contemplate more deeply about life and the meaning of it. During a trip outside the palace, he saw people who were old, some who fell ill and those who died. This contrasted greatly with his experiences in the palace where he lived a sheltered life, with everything well provided for and no opportunity to witness the harshness of human pain and suffering. As he came across these scenes and looked at the faces of those in misery, he contemplated, "I too, will one day fall ill, grow old and eventually die. What is the meaning of

life then? What is my purpose in life?"

He did not only feel the pain and distress among those who were ill, growing old or heading towards death, but also of the family and friends who were around the frail, the aged and the dead. "Is this all life is about?", "Can we escape this process?" and "What am I here to do?" These questions kept popping into his mind. He was shocked at the pressures of life that people experience and this got him thinking, "Maybe it is important to examine these issues of life. What can I truly give to my people as their future king?"

In his wanderings outside the palace grounds, he also met a hermit or a renunciant. It was the first time the prince saw a person with such a serene look, so he questioned his attendant about this unusual man. "Who is this man? What does he do?" His attendant explained that he is one of many who have given up the worldly life to cultivate the spiritual path and spend their lives trying to realise the truth of existence through meditative and contemplative processes. This explanation struck the prince immediately. It was a deep calling to walk the path of a renunciant to find the answers to the questions that he had. One night, he bade goodbye to his wife and newborn child and left the palace renouncing his family, status, belongings and inheritance. The prince realised that all these things would not be as important as finding something to give to his people, something that would go beyond just ruling them as a future king, and give them the answers to help them live a truly peaceful and happy life.

For the next six years, as a renunciant, he went to study with some of the great spiritual teachers of the land where he eventually reached the same levels of spiritual attainment as his teachers. However, Siddhartha was aware that his spiritual development was still unable to provide him with the answers to his questions. Some of his teachers even invited him to stay and teach alongside them, but he continued wandering in search of his answers. He realised that a part of his answer lies in finding the way to transform the negative habitual patterns that lies within each human being, which will ultimately lead to liberation.

Siddhartha knew that at that stage, his spiritual maturity was still insufficient for him to truly understand and break free from the underlying negativities, so he vowed

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Buddhism is not about deep philosophy, superstitious beliefs or meaningless rites or rituals. It goes back to the basics of living a good life, by exhorting us to avoid all unwholesome actions, to do wholesome things for the benefit of ourselves and others, and to keep purifying the mind... ”

to continue searching to realise the ultimate truth of existence. He could see that the supernatural powers that some teachers possess, although impressive, were not relevant or useful in the deepening of wisdom and transformation of one's problematic habitual patterns. He even spent many years following the ascetic practices, focusing on self-torture as a means to spiritual attainment. After years of undergoing severe self-mortification, he realised that he came no closer to the answers he sought. So, he finally decided to find his own way instead of following teachers and relying on traditional spiritual practices.

Siddharta then sat in meditation underneath a great tree beside the Niranjara river. He began to observe his physical and mental experiences from moment to moment, deepening his awareness into the workings of the body and mind. With this, his understanding of the nature of these processes grew. In the depths of his mind, he saw the truths pertaining to the nature of existence and through this wisdom, managed to cut through the deep underlying defilements, ultimately reaching enlightenment and full liberation.

His first words after reaching this stage of enlightenment were, "Through many a birth I wandered in this endless cycle of births and deaths, seeking but not finding, the builder of this house. Sorrowful it is to be born again and again. Oh house builder! You are seen. You shall build no house for me again. All your rafters are broken and your ridgepole shattered. My mind has attained the unconditioned, achieved in the end of craving." He had transcended all the mental afflictions of a human existence through seeing and understanding reality. From then on, he became known as the Awakened One, the Buddha. After achieving enlightenment, the Buddha gave his life to teaching what he knew for the next 45 years. He taught everyone from kings to slaves, treating them all as equals,

as long as they wanted to develop on the path towards liberation. At the age of 80, he passed away peacefully near the bank of a river under the shades of two sala trees. Throughout his life time, huge magnificent monasteries were built in his name, but at the end of his life, he chose a simple spot close to nature, under trees and beneath the open skies to breathe his last breath.

After the Buddha's death, his disciples led by Venerable Mahakasyapa came together to collate his teachings, so that they could be preserved for the generations to come. This was known as the first Buddhist Council, which was attended by approximately 500 key disciples of the Buddha, who have all under the guidance of the Buddha attained the highest levels of liberation. It was from this historical event that we have access today to the core of teachings of the Buddha. Throughout generations, the key message of the Buddha spread far and wide with various adaptations to suit the psyche and mentality of the people. That is why we have so many different schools and traditions of Buddhism. However, the core message of the Buddha's teachings remains the same and is contained in all schools of Buddhism. This is encapsulated in the Four Noble Truths, which was part of the first discourse given by the Buddha to his first five disciples after attaining enlightenment.

The Four Noble Truths are the Truths of:

1. Suffering
2. Cause of Suffering
3. Cessation of Suffering
4. The Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering

The first truth points to the realistic nature of life; that in the way we interact with life, suffering inevitably arises. It is a very realistic statement urging us to see and acknowledge that the experience of suffering is part and



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The Buddha's teachings are not just to be enshrined and never practised but to be understood and applied in our day to day lives. It is through this gradual practice and cultivation of the good qualities of the mind that we ultimately break free from the pain and suffering in life. ”

parcel of our existence. In fact, this is one teaching that goes to the core of human experience and normalises the fact that we all go through ups and downs in life. As pessimistic as the first noble truth may sound, the Buddha did not just stop teaching after having declared the first noble truth. He continued by stating the second noble truth, which is the cause of suffering. This takes a deep look into the root of suffering, which he taught arises out of our own attachment and cravings. He continued to elaborate that by removing the cause of our suffering then the suffering can cease, which is the third noble truth. In order to be able to know suffering, see its causes and remove it at the root level, a systematic teaching was given as the fourth noble truth, the path to the end of suffering.

Buddhism is not about deep philosophy, superstitious beliefs or meaningless rites or rituals. It goes back to the basics of living a good life, by exhorting us to avoid all unwholesome actions, to do wholesome things for the benefit of ourselves and others, and to keep purifying the mind through the cultivation of the noble eightfold path. Throughout our lives, we are dragged down by our attachments through greed, hatred and delusion, which form the root of our human suffering. It is through the realisation of how we react to life based on these habitual tendencies that we can truly transform and awaken wisdom.

The systematic training for spiritual development taught by the Buddha is also known as the Noble Eightfold Path, which emphasises the three aspects of morality, mental cultivation and wisdom. The entire path is largely reliant upon our ability to cultivate understanding towards the true nature of our life experiences. That is, through understanding arises wisdom which breaks through the chains of delusion and the grips of greed and hatred. To

do this, a strong mind is needed to be watchful of our physical and mental experiences from moment to moment.

Morality prepares the ground for planting the seeds of mental cultivation, which in turn gives rise to the tree of wisdom. A life with good morality enables a person to stand on the basic level of safety and security that is a prerequisite for the practice of mental cultivation and wisdom. It helps create a state of mind that is not overwhelmed by fear, anxiety, remorse and confusion. The work of mental cultivation involves training the mind so that it is deeply aware of each passing experience and sees things as they truly are. When the mind has the ability to perceive the realities of the body and mind, including the changing and non-personal nature of experience as well as the suffering that arises out of our clinging to these experiences, then a deep realisation and wisdom arises. This wisdom cuts at the root of the negative tendencies of greed and hatred and allow a deep sense of kindness and compassion to arise. Therefore, living by the Noble Eightfold Path leads one to a life without fear and without mental discomfort but one of peace, stability and kindness.

The Buddha's teachings are not just to be enshrined and never practised but to be understood and applied in our day to day lives. It is through this gradual practice and cultivation of the good qualities of the mind that we ultimately break free from the pain and suffering in life.

A story during the time of the Buddha nicely reflects the attitude we should have in approaching his teachings. There was once a man who regularly attended the Buddha's evening discourses. One day he came up to the Buddha and asked, "Venerable Sir, I've been a regular to your talks and I've seen how others have benefited from





your talks. But for me, I haven't changed much. Why is this?"

Instead of giving him a direct reply the Buddha questioned him, "Young man, you don't seem to come from this area, where are you from?"

The young man replied, "No, I'm not originally from Rajagaha but came from Magadha years ago to settle down."

"Then you must know the way from Rajagaha to Magadha very well! So, if someone from around here asks you for the way to Magadha, are you able to tell them?" the Buddha asked.

"Of course, I will never forget the way back to my hometown! I would tell them to go out the north gate, turn left..." The young man gave a detailed description of the entire journey from Rajagaha to Magadha.

The Buddha then asked, "So if you give someone the directions to your hometown, will they arrive at your hometown simply by listening to these directions?"

"Certainly not, sir. They need to take the journey themselves to reach Magadha. Not just by listening to the directions!" Upon saying this, the young man realised what the Buddha was really saying to him. You can listen to talks upon talks about the Buddha's teachings but without actual practice, one will gain nothing in return. No amount of thinking or studying the teachings can pull you out of suffering if you refuse to take the first step of walking the eightfold path. The Buddhist path of develop-

ment is one of proactive application of the teachings and gaining deeper understanding in the process, which continues to provide the inspiration to continue developing. The late Venerable Ying Shun wrote of two separate ways to approach spiritual practices. On the one hand, some people have faith, develop aspirations to practice, and then begin their spiritual practice. The entire process is sustained by a deep faith towards certain teachings or teachers, with a belief that great fruits will come to bear in some distant future or upon one's death. However, when the person's faith is challenged for one reason or another, the entire practice may crumble.

On the other hand, there is another approach to spiritual practice based on having faith, developing understanding, practising and verifying the teachings. On this path, although a person similarly starts with some faith towards a teaching, this approach first encourages one to understand the teachings before putting them into practice. From practising, one then sees for oneself whether the teachings are correct and bring benefit. Through this process of checking the true validity and efficacy of the teachings, one then comes full circle to develop greater faith that continues to inspire further practice. In this approach, there is no blind faith as the practice is based on a real understanding and honesty in testing out the teachings.

The heart of Buddhist practice encourages the second type of approach, which allows deep confidence to develop not by belief but by directly experiencing the benefits of the teachings in the here and now. We do not simply aspire to practise out of faith, but more importantly, develop the understanding that forms the basis of the practice and the willingness to test out the Buddha's teachings.

So at the end of the day, what is Buddhism? Different people may view Buddhism in different ways and may be attracted to different aspects of it. However, the fundamental message of Buddhist teachings is to encourage us to live a life with awareness and understanding. Only through cultivating awareness will wisdom grow, allowing us to truly know our moment to moment experiences in life. With wisdom, our lives naturally become more inclined towards a deep sense of peacefulness, happiness and stability that allow us to face the challenges in life without being perturbed by it. Removing the tendencies of greed and hatred through wisdom and understanding also gives rise to the love, kindness and compassion that flow freely in our interactions with the world. The Buddha gave us a way to see the true nature of our existence, to eradicate the cause of suffering in our lives and to cultivate the wonderful qualities of the mind. It is up to us to take up this invitation to develop and discover for ourselves a life of great wisdom, true happiness and boundless kindness.





Finding Happiness in Impermanence

by Venerable Neng Rong

What is Impermanence? Impermanence is a phenomenon and a law of our universe – it explains that all matter in our world is in a state of constant flux. The reason for this phenomenon is because everything arises due to causes and conditions.

We wish to find happiness through impermanence, but what kind of happiness are we looking for? Happiness comes in many forms; some forms of happiness are quickly followed by sadness, and I believe these are not the kind of happiness anyone would wish for. The kind of kindness we want on the contrary is something that is long term and also gives us peace of mind. The theme of tonight's talk -- Finding happiness in impermanence -- seems to suggest that we are unhappy at the moment, and the reason for our unhappiness is impermanence. However, is impermanence the real culprit of our pain and unhappiness? If it is not then what else could the culprit be? It is imperative that we find the real reason of our unhappiness in order to achieve real bliss and happiness.

Impermanence suggests constant change; it gives us the perception of instability and uncertainty that everything changes all the time. Impermanence is also all-encompassing -- all phenomena and things are unable to be exempted from it. Therefore, if we believe that impermanence is the ultimate source of our unhappiness, every single change that we experience would make us unhappy. However, the reality speaks otherwise. We seem to react differently to different changes; some we are oblivious to, some we are joyous about, and finally some we react with grief and sadness. Therefore, it seems to suggest that impermanence may not be the cause of our unhappiness as we believed it to be.

What is the real reason for our unhappiness then? Before we rush to answer, let us first have a think about what kind of change affects our emotions in a negative manner. Some examples may perhaps be the departing of our loved ones due to geographical separation, illness or death. On the same note, what kind of change are we oblivious to and therefore have very little effect on us?

Let us imagine this, it is a very windy day and a tree has been uprooted in our courtyard by the wind. We may be surprised, or we may not even care. However, if the tree has fallen on our newly purchased car, rather than

surprise or oblivion, we would most likely feel pain, distress and frustrated instead. Both circumstances describe the uprooting and falling of a tree, but why are we affected so minimally in one and so intensely in another? Although every phenomenon follows the principle of impermanence, among the many changes that are always happening around us, only some will have an effect on our emotions, like it is attached to our heart with a string. So why is that? The answer to that question is that as long as we believe that the object or event is related to us, it has an effect on our emotions.

Although we may agree that everything in our external world changes all the time, we often are unable to see that for ourselves. We still perceive ourselves as a stable and unchanging entity – fixed sense of "self". And therefore develop a very strong sense of "self-centredness". As a result of our egocentric nature, we build the perception of "my belongings", "my favourite objects" and suffer the pain of separation from loved ones, unfulfilled desires, and of aging, illness and death as a result of it. We believe certain objects or people "belong" to us, and therefore develop strong attachment to them, and wishing to have control over their development. Some, we wish for them to change to our liking, others, we wish for them to stay the same. However, everything – with no exceptions – ultimately follows the principle of impermanence and change from moment to moment. When these objects or people change against our wishes, we feel upset. What then, is the real culprit of our suffering? Is it impermanence, or ourselves?

In order for us to find happiness in impermanence, we need to first understand the true reason of our suffering – that it comes not from "impermanence" nor "change", but from our attachment to these external things and people that we care about, and therefore wish to have control of their outcome. This misconception results from our ignorance, as we fail to understand the true nature of ourselves and the external world – that they are both impermanent. Therefore, the process of our pursuit of happiness begins with the nurturing of wisdom, the removal of ignorance, and the reduction of our attachments. As we continue to purify our mind, we are able to be happier and more at ease with life.

If we look at impermanence from another perspective, we will see that the changing nature of impermanence

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It is not impermanence, but our attachment and ignorance that are the main culprit of our suffering.

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brings hope instead. This is because every event arises due to the coming together of many causes and conditions; we will be able to create our desired outcomes by supplying the right conditions. However, we may ask: how can we change for the better? What would be the right conditions to create our desired outcomes? The answer to the previous two questions lies in the law of Kamma (cause and effect). If we wish for a happy life, we need to supply the conditions that will give rise to happiness, such as amiability to others, the practice of forgiveness and humility, and to rejoice in others' good fortune and reducing our own jealousy. If we follow the same principle, we could not expect to have prosperity and success in our business dealings for example, if we harbour much anger and hatred, and we abuse everyone around us, be it our employees or customers.

There is a saying in the ancient sutta about impermanence – impermanence brings about suffering, suffering implies non-self. To explain the statement further, we experience pain due to the changing nature of things; and the very fact that we are suffering suggests that our very nature is changing too, that we do not have a fixed and unyielding identity. We falsely believe that we have a fixed and unchanging identity, therefore thinking that we are in full control of ourselves – our body, emotions, and thoughts. If it is really the case we are the absolute master of ourselves and not allowing ourselves to be affected by the events in our external world. However, the truth suggests otherwise. As hard as we may try, we would still experience pain and be emotionally affected by what is happening in our external world. This shows that we are not in control of ourselves, that we (our body, emotions, thoughts, and consciousness) change according to external events, and therefore we do not have a “fixed identity”.

In summary, we have covered two main points.

1. The optimistic nature of impermanence. Impermanence suggests optimism as it implies that we are able to create our desired outcomes if we learn to supply the right conditions. Many a times we fall into the traps of life and struggle to come out of it. When times are difficult we often fail to remember impermanence -- that these bad times too will pass away. And it is during those times we need to be optimistic, and to continue to supply wholesome conditions to pave the way for wholesome outcomes. Therefore it is important that we develop right view (the ability to truly understand the nature of things), which requires us to listen to the Dhamma, and to always remind ourselves of the changing nature

of things as well as its associated optimism. We need to remind ourselves that we have the ability to create the future that we want, therefore we need be motivated to living life to the fullest.

2. It is not impermanence, but our attachment and ignorance that are the main culprit of our suffering.

Our suffering is not due to the phenomenon of “impermanence”, but our attachment. This is because we are unaware of our true nature, resulting in the development of our greed, hatred, and delusion. We need to constantly remind ourselves the real reasons of our pain and suffering, which has been expounded by the Buddha through the “four noble truth” -- our suffering is due to our desires and ignorance. Therefore if we wish to be happy, we need to rid ourselves of suffering by identifying its real root.

An ancient Chinese folklore illustrates the value of facing the changing nature of our reality with optimism and equanimity. The story goes that there was an old man who has a beautiful white stallion. One day, the emperor caught sight of the stallion and wanted it for himself. However, the old man has formed a close bond with the stallion and therefore rejected the emperor's offer. The other villagers thought it was foolish of him to let such a golden opportunity go. A few days later, the white stallion was nowhere to be found. The villagers believed that the disappearance of the stallion was a huge loss to the old man which could have been prevented if he had agreed to the emperor's offer. To their surprise, the old man was remarkably calm, he believed that it was soon to jump to conclusions. A few days later, the white stallion has not only returned safely, but has also brought other wild horses with him. The villagers then remarked excitedly about the old man's good fortunes -- now that he has more horses at the cost of nothing! The old man was again calm and collected thinking that it was still too soon to jump to conclusion. Sure enough a short while later, the old man's son broke his leg while training the horses in the fields. The villagers broke into a discussion once again about the misfortune these horses have brought to the old man's family; and only to be met with a calmness and positivity. A few months later, war broke out in this country and all the young and fit males were asked to be enlisted to serve in the war. Many of them were either hurt or perished during the process. The old man's son was spared from the war due to his injuries. The villagers changed tunes once again, commenting on how fortunate the old man was. Having seen all the twist and turns in life, the old man advised his fellow villag-

ers that we would never know what the future holds; things are often never as good nor bad as it seemed. It is therefore important that we maintain equanimity in dealing with what life throws at us, and stay positive and hopeful always.

In our daily lives we jump to conclusions too often about events that happen to us; if it is good or bad for us, and feel happy or sad as a result. In actual fact we would never know what the future holds for us. We have a lot to learn from the way the old man deals with life's ups and downs. Impermanence is like a flowing river, we can never step in the same river twice. We need not feel depressed or hopeless if something seemed to not have come our way. Our emotional involvement would often make things worse. We should be optimistic instead, as everything is still changing. We should learn to supply the right conditions while carrying a light and joyous heart; and seek opportunities to better ourselves through life's adversity. It is important that we realize that the good and bad in our lives are a result of our own actions; we should not therefore lay the blame on others. Interestingly, we should also not blame our past kamma, as things in the past are beyond our control. We ought to face our current situations with a calm, joyous and a compassionate heart, inspiring ourselves to plant wholesome seeds for a happy life in the future.

Things change, and so do we. Recognizing this allows us to nurture tolerance and understanding. If somebody has offended us with his or her speech, we need to learn to take a step back and look at things in a broader perspective; perhaps this person has had a bad day, or perhaps it is this person's personality to be blunt and brash. At the end of the day, no one is perfect, and this includes us too. When we are provoked by the words and actions of others, it reminds us that we have yet freed ourselves from sufferings – our anger in this case -- and that we are still very much attached to ourselves – our views and belongings. But isn't this a great opportunity for us to reflect on our own shortcomings and seek to improve and better ourselves? We should therefore be grateful to everyone around us, as they act like a mirror, allowing ourselves to be aware of our own shortcomings, and to work to overcome our arrogance and attachments. Following from the same argument, our success today is not solely due to our own effort, but the coming together of many causes and conditions. We should therefore be grateful to others, and continue to rid ourselves of our arrogance and self-centredness. In addition, we should continuously try to nurture our generosity and keeping to the precepts; planting wholesome seeds in order to

create a more wholesome life.

The four points listed below are excerpts taken from a book, and are great references for all of you.

1. To treat ourselves like others -- equanimity

In our moment of highs, imagine that it is happening to someone else; imagine looking at ourselves through the eyes of others so we can maintain a level head and not become arrogant and conceited. Similarly, in our moment of lows, try to look at the situation objectively, and deal with it with a cool and balanced mind.

2. Putting ourselves in the shoes of others.

We need to look at things from other people's perspectives. With regards to the misfortune and needs of others, we should put ourselves in the shoes of others, so as to understand their feelings and real needs.

3. Respect the rights of others

To fully respect the autonomy of others; we need to respect their freedom and space, and try not to infringe it.

4. To understand the true nature of ourselves

According to the Buddhist teachings, if we are able to put ourselves into the shoes of others, respect the autonomy of others, treat everyone with compassion, and at the same time reflect on our own actions, we will then be able to gradually gain a deeper understanding of ourselves – that we are not a fixed and unchanging entity, but rather a combination of a variety of physical and mental elements. Having had this understanding, we could then not be attached to ourselves, e.g. our values and our belongings, and yet at the same time be able to function as an effective individual in a society that is built on the value of "self", and "ego". This is the state of being of someone who has understood the true meaning of non-self – to be able to live effectively and successfully in the conventional world without having to undergo the suffering that everyone else is going through as he or she is no longer attached to the outcomes of anything.

In conclusion, if we are able to overcome our attachment towards our 'self', we will be able to be happy despite the changing nature of life. Everything in our world arises, stays, changes, and eventually falls away; and each cycle is an opportunity for us to learn from, and a moment of infinite possibility. Understanding the true nature of impermanence will allow us to free ourselves from the dissatisfactions in life and achieve true happiness.



在無常中尋找快樂

能融法師

什麼是無常？無常是宇宙的一個現象，一個法則；它說明一切存在物都是變動性的。存在物之所以會變動，是因為他們是由很多許多條件組合而成。

我們想在無常中尋找快樂，想要尋找怎麼樣的快樂呢？快樂有很多種，有些快樂，悲傷尾隨在後，相信大家都不想要這種快樂。我們要的快樂，是能真正給我們清涼、自在，一直跟隨著我們的快樂。這個題目“在無常中尋找快樂”，好像是說，我們現在不快樂，不自在；或者說，是無常帶給我們不快樂。真的是“無常”造成我們的不快樂嗎？真的是無常帶給我們痛苦嗎？如果不是，那是什麼造成我們的不快樂呢？我們應該找出其原因，以尋獲真正的快樂。

無常是變動性的，它讓我們覺得事事都不穩定，事事都在變化當中。世間的一切現象、事物都逃不過無常，它們一直都在變化中。如果說是無常讓我們不快樂的話，那每一個變化，應該都會讓我們感到不快樂，這樣才能說“無常”是造成我們不快樂的原因。可是，有些事情變化時，我們可以不當一回事；有些事情變化時我們很高興；也有些事情在變化時，我們非常難過。這樣看來，無常應該不是帶給我們不快樂的原因。

那真正造就我們不快樂的是什麼？在未回答這問題之前，試想想，哪一種變化會牽動我們的情緒，讓我們不快樂？親人離開、生病、死亡？哪一些事情變化，我們不察覺，或者不理會？

假如有一天，外面刮起大風，屋外的一棵大樹倒下，我們只會感到驚訝，然後就置之不理。換個角度，如果刮大風時，倒下的大樹，壓在我們的新車上，那麼我們心裡就會很難過，很煩躁。這兩個例子同樣都是一棵大樹倒下，為什麼第一個例子我們能置之不理，而另一個例子我們會那麼難過呢？雖然事事都隨著無常的法則，但是在諸多的變化當中，有些事情會牽動我們的心，把我們的心繫得緊緊的，而有些事情我們完全不理，為什麼會這樣？

關鍵在於如果事情是與我們有關的，它就會牽動我們的心。我們有很強烈的自我意識，誤認為“我”是事實存在的，因而產生這是“我的東西”、“我愛的東西”的觀念，而也才会有愛別離

苦、求不得苦、生老病死苦。我們把所有的現象事物都誤認為是我們所屬的，牢牢地執取它，想操控它。我們也有所期待，希望它變成我們所要的樣子，或者保留於原狀不變。但是所有世間的現象與事物都會隨著無常的法則，時時刻刻都在變化之中。所以當它產生變化時，固執的我們就會很難過。試問是無常給我們帶來苦，還是我們自己的問題呢？

要在無常中尋找快樂，我們首先要真正了解是什麼造成我們的苦惱。我們要明白世間的快樂是短暫的，苦惱的原因不在於“無常”，不在於“變化”，而是在於我們的執著。我們對外在的事物現象染著，希望它停留在我們要的狀態，所以就造成了我們的苦。

我們之所以在無常中不快樂的原因其實就是因為我們的無明。無明就是我們對自我的不了解，對外在的不了解。由於無明，我們進一步的對事物產生執著。我們要尋找快樂，就要啟發智慧，去除無明，減少執著，這樣不斷提升與淨化，我們才能越活越快樂，漸漸的朝向真正解脫自在的快樂。

其實無常的法則給我們帶來希望，因為它給我們一個改變的機會。每件事都由許多條件促合而成，因此，如果我們能知道什麼樣的條件可以造就什麼樣的結果，那麼我們就可以提供適當的條件，讓事情達到圓滿。因此，無常除了變動性，也有積極性的特質。但是怎麼樣去改變，才能夠讓事情越來越好呢？我們要提供怎樣的條件才能夠達到我們想要的結果呢？這兩個問題，可以用因果法則來解答。如果希望得到一個快樂的生活，我們就要提供培養快樂的條件。例如我們對人友善，以禮待人，寬宏大量，謙虛理智，減少嫉恨，那漸漸地我們就會快樂。相反的，如果我們常常抱著嗔恨心，面無笑容，卻想在生意上財源廣進，那是行不通的。如果要生意蒸蒸日上，就應該提供相應的條件。

說到無常，經典裡常常提到一句話，“無常故苦，苦故無我。”這句話，怎麼解釋呢？因為無常的變化，我們感覺到苦，這苦的現象就說明我們是‘無我’的。我們誤以為“我”是實在的，是有主宰性的。如果真的是如此的話，那“我”應該是自己的主人，應該能控制一切，不應該受外在的因素所影響，不是嗎？可是，事實不是這樣的。“我”會苦，會因為被外在的因素而影響，而有情緒波動，這就足以證明“我”是沒有“我”的特質，既是沒有主宰性，那這“我”應該是“無我”的。“我”其實是五蘊和合體，因此我們不應該執著於我。

以上，我們已經談到了兩點：

1. 無常的積極性

無常有其積極性，因為它是條件性，變動性，所以我們可以配合因果的法則來提供好的條件，創造美好的未來。我們在生活當中，常常陷入陷阱。遇到問題的時候，我們常忘了無常，而感到傷心難過，愁眉苦臉。所以，建立堅固的正見非

常重要。而要建立穩固的正見，我們必須常常聽聞佛法，提醒自己，無常是變動性，可是它也有它的積極性，帶給我們改變的可能，鼓勵我們以樂觀的態度去生活。

2. 不是無常帶給我們苦，是我們的無明與執著。我們之所以感覺到苦，不是因為無常，而是因為我們的染著。我們對自己不了解，進而產生貪、嗔、痴等苦惱。我們要記得是無明和貪染造成苦，這就是佛陀所開示的四聖諦。佛陀告訴我們，我們之所以會苦，是因為我們的無明與執著。如果想去苦，我們一定要斷除苦的根本原因，這樣，才能達到真正的快樂。

《塞翁失馬》故事中的主角，就是一個在無常中，積極面對現實的例子。故事中說到在老子的時代，有位老人家有一匹很漂亮的白馬。皇帝曾想用高價購買這匹馬，但這位老人不肯，村民們都覺得他很愚蠢。有一天，白馬不見了。村民們議論紛紛，覺得這位老人損失慘重。如果老人之前把白馬賣給皇上，今天他就不會遺失這匹心愛的白馬。但老人卻很冷靜，覺得村民不應該這樣判斷，因為也許這不是一種損失。過了幾天，白馬平安歸來，而且還帶了一群野馬回來。村民們又議論了，覺得老人很幸運，多了那麼多匹馬。老人還是很平靜地看待這件事，覺得不應該隨便斷定是好是壞。老人的兒子天天訓練這些野馬，卻意外地在一次的訓練中跌斷了腳。於是，村民們就覺得，這些野馬的到來其實不是件好事，而是帶來了痛苦。老人還是覺得這些都是不必要的推論，事實只是孩子跌傷了腳，如此而已。有一天，國家發動了戰爭，村里所有年輕健全的兒子都得離家到戰場上。由於老人的兒子跌斷了腿，所以免服兵役。村民們都很難過，卻覺得老人很幸運。老人又提醒他們，也許事情也許不是想像中那麼悲慘，希望他們能以平常心，積極地繼續生活。

我們在生活中，一旦發生甚麼事情，我們總很快的判斷其禍福，揣測未來，而變得情緒化。可是，事實上沒有人能知道未來會發生什麼事。故事中的老人家的處事方式很值得我們學習。無常的變化，就是像流水一樣的流。我們不需要覺得倒霉、難過、想放棄。我們應該積極的面對現實，因為一切都是可以改變的。我們常常因為情緒化，而讓事情惡化。可是事情會如何轉變，其實我們自己都還不能非常確定。所以我們不需要做不必要的判斷與揣測。我們應該配合因果的法則，提供正確的因緣，以輕鬆的心情，樂觀的態度面對生活，從困難挫折中提升自己。無常讓每件事情都有轉變的機會。生活中的快樂和不快樂，都是我們自己的行為所帶來，我們不需要責怪別人，也不要埋怨自己的業障。我們應以平靜、歡喜、慈悲的心去引發自己的善業，培養更多的善因，那麼生活就會越來越順利。此外，我們也應當保持正思維，培養一顆清淨的心，減少貪嗔癡，在意志上時時調整自己，抱著感恩的心情好好生活。

事情會變，人也會變。如果我們能了解這世間的一切都有轉機，那我們就不會斤斤計較，貪染以

及自我膨脹。別人常因為情緒不好，或者講話技巧不好，得罪了我們，我們要學會體諒，寬恕別人，了解我們身邊的人不是十全十美，包括我們自己。如果別人的行動言語，讓我們生氣，讓我們很不自在，就證明了我們還有很重的煩惱，提醒我們其實自己也不完美，還有很強的我執。這豈不是讓我們好好反省，加緊努力糾正自己的好機會嗎？因此我們應該感恩每一個人，他們像一面鏡子，讓我們看到自己的缺陷，進而學習降伏我慢、我執。我們能擁有今天的成功，不是我們一個人的功勞，而是周遭所有因緣條件的配合。因此，我們應該學習謙虛，不讓驕慢心生起，感念他人，這樣不斷的訓練將幫助我們減少我慢，我執。此外，也可以藉此培養忍辱、布施、持戒的習慣，引發更多的善業，使我們生活得更快樂。

以下的四句話摘錄自一篇文章，可供大家參考：

1·把自己當成別人—當我們感覺歡喜如狂，我們應該把自己當別人，好像別人在看待自己一樣。平靜一些，不要太衝動而得意忘形。傷心的時候，我們也能以平常心看待事情。

2·把別人當自己—把別人放在自己的立場考量。對於別人不幸，需要，我們應站在他們的立場，那我們就能了解他們的感受、需要。

3·把別人當別人—充分尊重每個人的獨立性，對別人我們要尊敬，盡量不要過分的侵犯別人的自由、空間。

4·把自己當自己—從佛教的角度來看，如果我們能在生活中多站在別人的立場考量問題，減輕自我中心意識，尊重他人，以慈悲心對待眾生，同時，反觀自己，漸漸提升對自我的認識，最後了解“我”是五蘊和合，並沒有實在的‘我’，但在不執著於我的當兒卻又可以利用“我”來發揮功能，這就是所謂的‘把自己當自己’。此亦即禪宗所說的‘見山是山，見山不是山，最後還是見山是山。’這是透視無我的境界，一位覺悟無我真理的人所發揮出來的力量是無限的。

總的來說，如果我們能突破對“我”的染著，那在無常中，我們就會越活越快樂。所有的事物都在生、住、異、滅中。滅，只是一個現象，並不是完全消滅不見。每一個生、住、異、滅都是我們學習的機會，每個階段都有轉機，改變的可能。真正透視無常的道理，我們就能在無常中尋找快樂，達到真正的解脫。



Good times, Bad times



by Rod Lee

Good times are followed by bad times. Bad times are followed by good times. Thich Nhat Hanh, a great Buddhist Master, said "Nothing remains the same for two consecutive moments". One of the most important realisations that you can develop is that of impermanence, where everything is constantly changing in the continuous flux of life.

Psychologically and physically, we are never the same at any two points in time. Every stage of our lives, from being a child to becoming an adult – in our bodies, old cells are subjected to change and are replaced by new cells continuously. In our minds, one thought gives rise to the next thought, so the previous moment of mind is decayed. Even routine tasks such as washing up, you have never done it the same before nor will you do it the same afterwards. Everything changes, moment by moment. No individual will remain the same throughout their entire lifetime.

Clinging to Permanence

If we buy a bunch of flowers, we know they will eventually die and we accept that. However, when we talk about people, we go through intense suffering when they become impermanent. The truth is that they too will eventually die, and things are constantly changing. But we are often shocked when it happens. The trouble is that, as humans, we want things to be permanent. Therein lies the paradox – as trying to make our happiness permanent stops us from observing what is really going on and creates a lot of suffering for us.

However, impermanence and change are the undeniable truths of our existence. Nothing in this world is fixed and permanent. Decay is inherent in all component things. The moment we make something, it is already decaying. If you accept the way impermanence works, then there is not as much suffering. Of course there is the connection with our family, and we love them. But we have to realise that our loved ones are also impermanent; this is the nature of change and there is nothing that we can do to stop the change. We can influence it a little bit but eventually things decay. That does not mean that we cannot have enduring relationships, but they too, will end. Every beginning ends with a finishing.

In many ways, society tries to ignore and play down the idea that things are changing because we may feel that it is confronting or scary. However, the good news about impermanence is that if we can change, then we can also change for the better. Just imagine if everything were

solid and permanent, nothing would ever change. Therefore our suffering will never change, and we would have no way of improving our situations or ourselves. What we experience now is the result of previous karma. But at this moment, we have the opportunity to change our karmic potential for the future.

For example, if someone suddenly starts to abuse me and I recognise that my previous karma has created this situation right now, I can then change it to a completely different experience for the future. I can send that person positive thoughts of compassion and understanding, and create a new karma for that person to turn up in my life again, but this time as a friend rather than someone who is abusing me. Thus by knowing the nature of impermanence, we can change our karmic future. Without impermanence, life would be impossible. So impermanence is actually our best friend, and something that we need to understand and to accept completely. Although there is suffering, we can use impermanence as an instrument to help us penetrate deeply into reality and obtain liberation.

Using Impermanence in Everyday Life

Here is a little exercise. If we live for 80 years, then by the time we are 40 years old, we would have spent approximately 13 years sleeping, 13 years working, 6 years eating, cooking and washing up, and 5 years on other activities such as studying, TV, etc. Thus our lives are taken up by so many activities. How much time do we spend on emails, Facebook, Twitter... and the list goes on? Technology allows connection with your friends. But what percentage of it becomes an indulgent waste? We keep getting more and more involved in these activities and our mind does not necessarily get refreshed and we might not get enough sleep.

From this exercise, we can see that in 40 years we only have 3 years of mind cultivation – that is about the time that is left, probably less. Eventually, when our impending end arrives, we find that we have not used enough time to cultivate our minds in a positive way. Yet it is only our karma that will follow us into the next rebirth. If we recognise that our imminent death is racing towards us very quickly, then we start to become more essential in our ways. It is not about getting rid of everything and meditating everyday, but about understanding how we can use our time wisely. We can cultivate our Dhamma practice even when using things like Facebook. Rather than just a way of indulgence, we can use it in a way that may actually be beneficial, such as contacting someone who needs emotional help.

So understanding impermanence can give us great insight in grabbing the best of what we can have. It is about seizing the moment. The understanding of impermanence develops your concentration into the moment. It starts to place you in the present rather than in the future or the past because the present will never come this way again. When I did some travelling by myself around the world in the 80's, I did not take many photos because I did not want to see my life through a set of pictures. So

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The common human ego grasping intention of “I don’t want to be wrong, I want to be right” causes us many of our problems.

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I made a point of just experiencing what was happening because that was the essence of the experience. While I was looking at the Eiffel tower, I just wanted to stand there and feel what it was like because it will never happen for me like this again. I can go back to that Eiffel tower a thousand times but that one moment in time was the only time that I was experiencing it that way.

In relationships, we often take others for granted. If we care about people, maybe it is time now to say that we love them instead of saying “I’ll do it later”, so that we do not have regrets later on. The reason why we do not do it is because at some level, we think that things are permanent. However, we cannot predict when that person will depart from our lives and occasionally, we hear stories where people have lost their loved ones in a tragic accident and the last thing they had with that person was an argument. Recognising impermanence will make us more compassionate to those people that we care about.

Continuous Rebirth

When you no longer exist in bodily form, the mind continues. From the Buddhist perspective, the mind continues in a cycle of rebirth, until we decide to step off from the cycle. Nirvana is where we cease the karmic influences that push us into the next life and cease the cycle of suffering. During our lifetime, our mind is constantly changing – from happy to sad, to indifferent, and so on... We have the opportunity of changing the mind from positive to negative at any split second. This is the point of impermanence that can be changed and we can change it in any direction. We cannot change the past, but we can change the future.

Ultimately, it is the projection of our mind into everything that eventually creates our suffering. If we create a reality of negativity, that is how we will experience things. We might think negatively of people and once we have created that karma, we might have that happen to us again in the future. For example, a young martial artist from New York always gets into fights wherever he goes. He had created this reality that the world is a dangerous place and he was always looking for the next guy to at-

tack him. Because his whole persona and energy was one of fear and aggression, people who are tuned into fear and aggression will attack him.

There is a concept in Buddhism about throwing karma, which determines the state of your next rebirth. If we have a peaceful and happy mind in our last moments, we can be reborn into good conditions and a comfortable life. Conversely, if we have a miserable mind in our last moments, we may be reborn into miserable conditions. So we do not want to die with our mind focused on negativity such as anger and sadness. We might have had a great life but if we have not trained our minds well enough, we may decide to be angry for a couple of hours because we think it is justified. The reason we could die in anger or sadness is because we are not living a positive life right now. By being angry or sad, we will not make our or other people’s lives better. So it is about becoming relaxed in the present. Whatever stresses you are under at the moment, they will pass. It is impermanent – and in 100 years, no one will care about it, not even you.

It is not about “I’ll be good now, for the sake of a good rebirth” but about “I’ll be good now because that’s creating a reality that I want to live in”. It does not matter whether you believe in rebirth. If there is a rebirth, then you have created a harmonious rebirth. If there is no rebirth, then you have created harmony in your life now. By creating that harmony continuously, you are in a sense rebirthing yourself, moment by moment – and this can have a powerful effect on the people around you. There was a story about an old Catholic nun suffering from severe bone cancer. In the last two weeks of her life, she spent every spare moment to pray for all the sick people in the world even though she was in serious pain. After she passed away, all the nuns would pray in her room because it had an incredible feeling of sanctity and euphoria resulting from her incredibly positive mind. So her story demonstrates the power of cultivating a positive mind.

The important point is to try not to have a negative mind at any time at all if possible. However, if you do have a negative mind, then investigate it and find out why you feel that way. What we put out is what we get back. If you generate positive energy, that is what you will re-

ceive, whether it is in this life or the next life. You can change the reality for yourself and create this moment-by-moment rebirth. You can rebirth yourself constantly in a positive way. To do that, you have to be vigilant in constantly watching your mind and questioning, "Am I projecting a negative thought?" Do not say "Oh, I'll think about it tomorrow. I'll just be grumpy today". When you get up in the morning and you are grumpy, how many people were at the receiving end of your grumpiness?

Conflict Resolution

Let's talk about justifiable anger. The common human ego grasping intention of "I don't want to be wrong, I want to be right" causes us many of our problems. If someone creates havoc in your life, the havoc that you experience is due to your previous karma, and this person was just the catalyst for you to experience that negative karma. When you are in a conflict, the other person may be determined to prove that their position is absolutely right and not be interested in resolving the problem. It is difficult when you are being accused and you know that you are correct. But instead of saying "oh, whatever", you can try to understand the other person's position. You can let go of your own ground and apologise for their anger: "I'm really sorry that's upset you". Then you can resolve the conflict by conceding your ground without losing your integrity.

By enforcing the communication, the other person will end up in your direction. It will happen because you let things become fluid. So when we work with the right motivations, great things can happen. However, occasionally, you have to walk away from it. You might do all the right things, and you might apologise but they are still angry – then that is their problem. Sometimes you have to walk away from the situation because you cannot change them. That may be their opinion for life. None of us get out of here without some people disliking us, that is just the way it is and we have to accept that. Samsara is imperfect. But thankfully, it is impermanent too. People will come and go in your lives. Things will keep changing.

Good times?



Bad times?





Right and Wrong, any other way?

by Sister Khan Le Van

My teacher always taught us to question ourselves after we learnt something, "How does the teaching help us release our suffering, or increase our happiness, so that we can avoid those intellectual-only teachings, and make it practical."

"Please use your energy wisely in the university and practice wisely, and see how the Buddhist teaching applies. The teachings are only notions, it is the actual practice that matters."

"Come and experience for yourself, this is the way that the Buddha left behind."

A French philosopher once said, "Man is the sum of his acts". Indeed, each of us is a collection of our actions. Our actions can be both cause and result of our store consciousness. In Buddhist psychology, there are 8 consciousnesses. 5 of them are the senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch). The 6th consciousness is the mind consciousness which allows us to recognise what is going on and/or experience feelings, such as knowing we are sad or happy. Usually we are unaware of the 7th consciousness, but it forms our ego. The 8th consciousness is called *alaya vijñāna* or store consciousness. The store consciousness contains all kinds of seeds. There are wholesome and unwholesome seeds. Wholesome seeds are like understanding, love, mindfulness, forgiveness and so on. Unwholesome seeds are like sadness, anger, hostility, etc... which cause sufferings. The mind itself is the storehouse of the consciousness. The seeds stored in the 8th consciousness can manifest itself in the 6th consciousness. As such, our happiness or sadness, i.e. wholesomeness or unwholesomeness are dictated by the seeds we have sown in the 8th consciousness. This is why we have to be very careful about what we think, touch, hear, and so on, because whatever we come into contact with or create through our action, speech and thought can become the seeds in the store consciousness. Our happiness depends on the quality of the seeds in the store consciousness. If we have more wholesome seeds, we are happier. If we have more unwholesome seeds such as anger and jealousy, they will manifest and cause sufferings. They form the person we are, and this is what is meant by "we are the sum of our actions"

At times, we can be hurt and we want to heal ourselves. Healing takes place deep in the consciousness through

transforming the causes of suffering. This happens by changing the habits that cause the planting of the seeds, and this needs to happen deep in our consciousness, not just at the level of our sense-based consciousness. By changing the motivation of our speech, action and thoughts, we change the seeds we put into the deep consciousness. These in turn blossom and influence further our speech, action and thoughts, as well as influence our environment, leading us to a more favourable environment and eventually to happier states. If the changes we make are only at the level of the 5 sense consciousnesses, then we may feel happy momentarily, but we may do things in the same way and be trapped again. So we have to be careful in selecting what to come in contact with and how we process them, so we are nurturing only the wholesome seeds. What are the things that we should do?

There are 3 kinds of actions: 1. Mind-action or thought, 2. Speech action, and 3. Body action. The mind dictates the other 2 actions. Before any Body actions take place, thought alone can make the world tremble. In our practice, we have to be careful with our thoughts. How do we accomplish that? The method the Buddha taught is mindfulness, which is to be aware of what is going on. With mindfulness, we can identify which types of seeds are currently manifesting. When we are faced with such a situation, do not worry; for example, we recognise that the seed of anger is flowering. That recognition means there is the seed of mindfulness, besides the seed of anger, that is present at that moment. We can say with our in-breath "Breathing in, I know that I am experiencing the feeling of anger; breathing out, I smile to my anger." Now, anger is embraced and is taken care of, instead of being pushed away, through denial of what is going on. Just breathe in, take note of the anger, and breathe out, embracing the anger. With the mind-action as the cause, it will flower to a result-action. This is called *hetu* (kammic cause) and *phala* (effect). That is, action as cause and action as effect. An example is a flower. The flower is an effect of the garden, produced by a combination of conditions such as the soil, the fertiliser, the sunlight, the gardener and so on. Everything "inter-are" in order to exist. Because of this inter-being, it is said there is no self or emptiness of self. This applies to all phenomena. In our daily interactions, we need to touch everything deeply, to the root cause of things. From this understanding of inter-dependence, we start to develop the sense

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Right or wrong is assessed on the basis of whether it is conducive or not conducive to liberation from suffering.

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of compassion. For example, in order to take care of our lungs, we have to take care of the air we breathe in, of the environment, of the mother Earth, of the rivers and so on. We must think of how to consume in a responsible way in order to take care of the environment. From here, we will know what we need to do now so that the result is happier conditions for ourselves and others.

Many times when we say “right” or “wrong”, it is not in the absolute term that we should dwell on. Right or wrong is assessed on the basis of whether it is conducive or not conducive to liberation from suffering. If we do an action and it will cause suffering to ourselves and/or others, then we should not do it. When we consume alcohol, we feel that it is pleasant, but it can also harm the liver, or lead to an accident, whereupon others may be harmed. The effects are not limited to oneself, but also affect others collectively. It is also not limited to purely self or purely collective, but may overlap. When we are driving, the effect of poor eyesight is not limited to purely ourselves, since accidents can happen and other people can be affected. As result of this understanding, we learn to open our hearts and experience emptiness. Emptiness is no longer a notion. We understand that we all “inter-are”. (Inter-be is a new terminology suggested by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh.)

So, the question to ask is, how do things manifest? There are 3 aspects to the manifestation of seeds. Firstly, different kinds of seeds will bear fruit of their own kind. Apple seeds can only grow apple trees. Secondly, seeds planted will ripen in their own time. Mango seeds may take 5 years to flower, but orange seeds may take 2 years. Thirdly, the seeds that ripen can change within itself, e.g. when a mango ripens, it changes its colour from green to orange.

In our practice, we need to learn how to plant and nurture the wholesome seeds. The way has been mentioned in the Noble Eightfold Path, namely Right Effort. Right Effort is to apply our energy in the right way in response to the flowering seeds. There are 4 ways to apply our right effort, in dealing with unwholesome and wholesome seeds:

1- When an unwholesome seed is manifesting, try your best to let it go back to the dormant state. For example, with the seed of anger, a wrong effort would be to shout

or act out or hit something, as that would only further sustain the anger flower. Our energy should be directed instead at helping the flower of anger to dissipate. Be mindful of the anger with the help of the in- and out-breath (embracing the anger), watch it, and just let it go. You may need to leave the environment immediately in order to take care of your anger by practising walking meditation and going back to your breath. There are many techniques that are taught on how to deal with our anger.

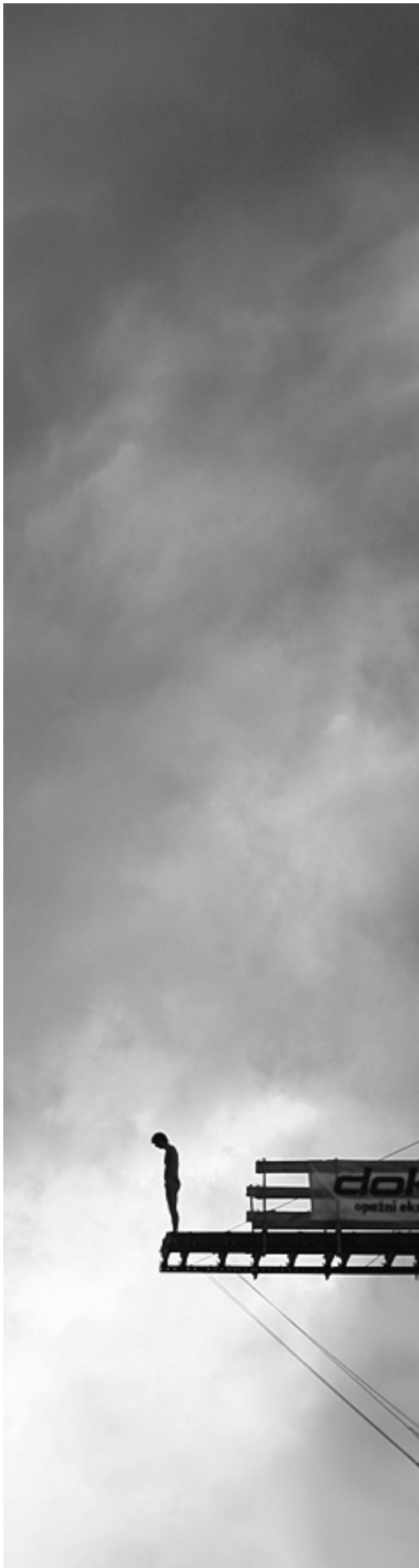
2- For those unwholesome seeds in the stored consciousness that are dormant and not yet manifesting, use all your effort to guard the 5 senses, to prevent them from flowering, to let them be in the dormant state as long as possible.

3- For wholesome seeds that are manifesting, try your best to sustain and nurture them, to keep them blossoming.

4- For wholesome seeds that are yet to manifest, try your best to encourage them to blossom, nurturing the seeds of mindfulness, of clarity, of wisdom, of compassion and so on.

Each day, my practice includes quiet contemplation that “I am the consequence of my actions”. This practice helps us to reflect on and adjust our speech, actions and thoughts towards liberation from our suffering. When we pass away, we cannot take away our body, but we take with us the conditions created by our speech, actions and thoughts. We should also take note that the created consequences during our lifetime are not solely due to ourselves but there are also other sources: the environment we are living in and the seeds we inherit from our parents can contribute to the ripening of the wholesome or unwholesome seeds within us. Understanding this fact will strengthen our compassion, leading to the urge to help other beings. We need to look deep into the person we wish to help, to see their wholesome seeds, and help them nurture the seeds so one day they can blossom.

There are 6 realms of rebirth as mentioned in Buddhist cosmology, and each of us has the capacity to be in any of these realms. The most referred to are Heaven, Human and Hell realms. We do not have to die to be reborn in these realms. What is hell like for you? It can well be



experienced in this lifetime. There are many 'zombies' around. Why zombies? Because they are not in a state of mindfulness, they are stuck in their state of suffering (sometimes we could be one of them too). Their body and mind are not united. Similarly, we have to look deep into them, see what their conditions are like, where they are coming from, how was their upbringing, so that we can help them as they are.

We are the ones who drive our own destiny. Where do we want to go? To the realm of hell? Or the heavens? Let us practise together as a Sangha, the community of Buddhist practitioners, of like-minded people, going towards the direction of Truth, Wholesomeness and Beauty. For example, the fact that we are here tonight, is due to the choice that we made to come and listen to a Dhamma talk, to listen to wise words, to learn from it and to be with like-minded friends. Recognise our current situation, understand the conditions we are in, and make effort to put ourselves in environments that strengthen our wholesome seeds and distant ourselves from environments that are conducive to unwholesome seeds. Go together as a Buddhist community, with a common mindset, support each other in the practice, and look for the wholesome direction.

To sum up: In order to gear ourselves toward enlightenment, mindfulness is a key technique, which is to be aware of what is going on in the 5 aggregates and the external environment. One of the techniques is through awareness of the breath; it is the quickest way to bring yourself 'home'. 'Home' is wherever you are, where your body is, the here and now. Through your meditation, if you notice irritation, you bring your attention back to your breath, and you can tell yourself, "Breathing in, I notice my irritation, Breathing out, I smile to my irritation". In this way, you do not see your irritation as your enemy, but irritation is just irritation, and it will go away. The more we are aware of it, the more we do not enforce it, the weaker that seed will be.

Sister gave us 3 points to remember:

- 1) *Mindfulness*
- 2) *Be in the Sangha*
- 3) *Be selective in your daily life on what you consume.*

In concluding "Right or Wrong... Any other way?", we have learnt from Sister that right or wrong as used in the layman's term is insufficient to describe the Dhamma path. The Dhamma path has to be experienced by ourselves. The "right" way would be to create conditions through our body, speech and mind toward happiness, toward enlightenment. At the same time, we have to put in Right Effort to encourage wholesome seeds to blossom, and sustain blossomed wholesome seeds, at the same time letting go of unwholesome seeds and preventing unwholesome seeds from being implanted. All these must take place from the body, speech and mind. Hence "right" and "wrong" is but relative terms that reflect one another, and the real way is realising what conditions are wholesome and be inclined toward them.



The Dependent Origination of Life

by Venerable Neng Rong

In Buddhist views, life is dependent originated. As such, Buddhists do not debate on the topic of the origin of the universe or of life. Some people believe life is created by a supreme being, some believe it is through evolution, and some believe life began spontaneously, without cause or reason. Venerable Nagarjuna challenges these schools of thoughts through his work of "No-Birth through Four Gates" in "Sastra of the Middle Way". In this teaching, the four sayings go by:

- 1) Self-existence – The Self is born of the Self, in other words, copied, or cloned. If the Self is an entity by itself, which is unchanging in nature, then would the Self born of the Self be exactly the same? Even if the Self was copied, would he be exactly the same? If there was some discrepancy, then the Self cannot give birth to the Self, and this saying would be self-contradictory.
- 2) Born of others – The Self if born through another being. If the Self has an unchanging nature, then it cannot change itself to give rise to another being.
- 3) Born together – This implies $A+B=C$. As mentioned above, if A and B have an unchanging nature, then they cannot be changed to produce C.
- 4) Random birth – This implies spontaneous birth without any reason at all. This is naturally impossible.

If a body is an entity by itself, then it cannot change because it is already a fundamental unit on its own. If it cannot change, then it cannot give rise to another being. If such is the case, then how does Buddhism explain the coming of life? In Buddhism, it is said that life is dependent arising and life is born of conditions. Arising from conditions is like the formula $A+B=C$, but it is different to 'Common Birth'. In 'Common Birth', the "A" and "B" are entities with a "self" nature that give rise to "C" when they come together, but in dependent origination, "A" and "B" themselves are made up of multiple conditions and are always changing in nature. In other words, "A" and "B" have also arisen from other dependent conditions, and they are also of the nature to change. It is because of this nature to change that "A" and "B" can change and combine to become "C", which is again made of multiple conditions and subjected to change. Hence, dependent arising and 'born together' is different.

What is the difference then between "dependent arising" and "dependent origination"? Put simply, "dependent origination" is a law of nature and "dependent arising" is the phenomenon that we observe from the workings of the law of "dependent origination".

The definition of "Dependent origination" roughly follows this formulation found across many Buddhist canonical discourses:

"When this is, that is.

From the arising of this comes the arising of that.

When this isn't, that isn't.

From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that."

In the formulation, there is mention of "this" and "that", and they are linked together by cause and effect. Dependent origination is not as simple as we imagine, because everything is conditional, and these conditions in turn follow certain natural rules and do not occur randomly. For instance, we cannot make a human-shaped figurine out of mud and hope that a real human will walk out from it. This is clearly absurd and it does not follow the law of cause and effect.

In order to understand dependent origination, we need to understand the following three rules:

- 1) Effect arises from a cause – the arising of all phenomenons must have its contributory cause.
- 2) Natural progression – cause and effect are governed by certain laws. For instance, when a man is born, he must die eventually, when good deeds are done, good results will ensue. These laws are not created by the Buddha, but are laws of nature.
- 3) Emptiness in nature – all phenomenons are empty in nature, are subjected to change and are conditional. All phenomenons are devoid of a Self, but is instead a conglomeration of conditions. If there is a "Self" nature in objects, then it is impossible for a phenomenon to form as nothing can change within that "Self". This conditionality of phenomenon also applies to the law of kamma or cause and effect, as cause and effect is simply the observable component of dependent origination. Cause and effect is a law of nature that is certain, structured and ever present, and all these can happen because of the emptiness nature of phenomenon.

Dependent origination is a core topic in Buddhism. It is this exact law of nature that the Buddha Sakyamuni gained insight into when he attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree more than 2,500 years ago. In order to better explain this law of nature to sentient beings, he explained it through other teachings, such as the Four Noble Truths, and the Noble Eightfold Path. Hence, we will come to realise that there is no conflict between dependent origination (to keep consistency throughout ar-

ticle) and the teachings of the Four Noble Truths. Why is there suffering as stated in the First Noble Truth? It stems from our defilements of greed, hatred and delusion that in turn lead to our unwholesome actions, leading to unwholesome results that we receive as suffering. This cycle is what we can observe as being dependent origination.

It is vital that we understand the principle of dependent origination. It is through this understanding that we can put the law of cause and effect into its proper context. In addition, we must also understand the emptiness nature of phenomenon, and that everything is subjected to change. More often than not, we misguide ourselves into thinking that once a bad deed is done, there is no redemption and it can only get worse. However, if we understand the law of cause and effect, we will know that the outcome depends on the conditions we put in and if we can bring in the right conditions, we can potentially bring about a positive change.

We have briefly explained what dependent origination means in Buddhism, and let us now explore how dependent origination plays a role in life. The Buddha said that our lives arise from multiple conditions, hence, it is "beginning-less". Our lives arise from conditions, and the conditions in turn arise from multiple other conditions. If this is so, how are we able to pinpoint an exact starting point? Why is it that we keep going through the cycles of rebirth? This stems from our strong "ego", or "attachment to ourselves". We do not wish to die, and we wish to live on into the next moment. This forms our "love of becoming" or "craving for continued existence". Not only do we love ourselves, we are also attached to our belongings, this forms our "love of our environment" of "attachment to form". Blinded by our attachment to our "Self", our form and belongings, we are unable to penetrate the truth that everything is empty in nature and is subjected to change. Hence, when we die, we are unable to let go of our "Self" and our strong "craving for continued existence" will lead us to being reborn. This is called "ignorance".

Ignorance of the truth of "Self" + strong craving for continued existence → Ignorance (motivating factor/inertia)

Ignorance (motivating factor/inertia) + Past kamma created by our body, speech and mind (conditions) → Beginning of new existence or life

Everyone wishes to be born into a good place, but not everybody can get what he or she wishes for as this is influenced by kamma. If someone wishes to buy a plot of land, and he has a lot of resources, he is able to buy a large plot of land. Conversely, if he has little resources, he is only able to buy a small plot of land. This "resource" is analogous to our kamma.

With Ignorance as a motivating factor, coupled with kammic energy from our past actions as a resource pool, consciousness is formed together with other supporting conditions. This consciousness is termed *adana* consciousness or "holding on to" consciousness as it stems from "attachment to ego/self". Combining the driving forces

of our ignorance and kamma, we will naturally seek the conditions and environment for life to begin. When consciousness arises, "name and form" arises, which gives rise to our body. "Name" is of mental form, and "form" is of physical form. The mental and physical aspects are already developing as early as when one is conceived in the mother's womb.

As the foetus grows gradually, the "six sense gates" develop, and they are: eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch and mind. When these six senses interact with the environment, there is "contact". "Contact" gives rise to "sensations", which we either like, or dislike. With the arising of "sensations", we develop "craving", craving for the pleasant sensations, or craving for the disappearance of unpleasant sensations, which leads to "attachment". "Attachment" refers to attachment to self/ego, to sensual pleasures, to ideologies or even to wrong views/wrong precepts. When we become overwhelmed with this attachment and act on it, and overlook that it is, in fact, impermanent and empty in nature, we have created the conditions for "becoming". This "becoming" is the kammic energy that leads to a future existence in the sense realms, form realms and formless realms. With this potential for future life, it will naturally bloom into new life with the passing of time. Birth will ensue, and with that, old age, sickness and eventually death. The above mentioned is what the Buddha referred to as the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination (Sanskrit/Pali: Twelve *Nidanas*), and we go through this cycle of birth and death continuously. The twelve links affect each other, maintaining the birth cycle as such:

Ignorance → (mental) formation → consciousness → name and form → six sense gates → contact → sensations → craving → attachment → becoming → birth → old age, sickness, death

These twelve *nidanas* of dependent origination illustrate the interdependence and cause and effect relationship of each other. The individual *nidanas* cannot be moved to another location within the chain as they follow the law of cause and effect. This law of cause and effect is what the Buddha saw clearly with his clarity of mind. The cause of one *nidana* leading to the next *nidana* in the link of dependent origination is what was referred to as "natural progression" earlier. Once we have understood this formulation, we shall also understand that the links are also empty in nature, and they can be altered as well. Hence, we can reverse the links in dependent origination, and follow the natural progression to full enlightenment.

How then, can we break through the cycle and gain liberation? One of the crucial points is "contact". The *suttas* often mention "guard your sense doors", referring to the need to use our wisdom when the senses come into contact with the environment. For instance, our minds can get ensnared easily when our eyes see a form that is pleasant. However, with the understanding of emptiness in nature, we shall not cling onto such a form. Hence to "guard your sense doors" is not to blind your senses, but to cultivate an impartial mind, and this is where the practice lies. With an untrained mind, we can get ensnared and swayed easily when the sense doors come into con-

tact with the stimuli, and we will form opinions of “good sensation” or “bad sensation”, which in turn leads to the tumbling through the links of dependent origination. If we are alert enough to understand the emptiness of sensations, we can still halt the cycle of becoming. However, if we start developing craving, it becomes difficult to stop the cycle as we have begun heading toward attachment and so on uncontrollably.

Hence, if we are able to apply the Right View of empty nature at the link of “contact” or at “sensation”, and prevent “craving”, “attachment” and “becoming” from coming into place, we would have prevented the kammic energy for future existence from forming, and we would be able to liberate ourselves. Once we are able to let go of our ego or “self”, then there would be no more craving for our “self” and naturally, no more craving for a future becoming. Without these, there would be no source of energy that will lead to becoming, and with the absence of ignorance as a driving(?) factor, there will not be “consciousness” and “name and form”, and we would have utterly be liberated from the cycle of life and death.

The entire discussion thus far is in fact the elaboration of the first and second Noble Truths, which are “Suffering” and “Cause of Suffering” respectively, and in order to liberate ourselves from suffering, we have to practice the Noble Eightfold Path. The discussion of Dependent Origination usually revolves around the Twelve Links because it offers a more comprehensive explanation; however, the first and second Noble Truths, the teaching of “delusion, kamma and suffering” are in fact teachings of cycles of Dependent Origination as well. Delusion is ignorance, and with ignorance, unwholesome kamma or unwholesome actions ensue, which lead to suffering, then to frustrations. Without wisdom, the cycle repeats itself again and again, which we can see is also a form of Dependent Origination.

The teaching of Dependent Origination is a very profound one. It encompasses the concept of kamma, the emptiness nature of phenomenon and also the law of non-self and impermanence. In order to educate sentient beings of this profound teaching, the Buddha came up with so many different ways of looking at this teaching through means of Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path and many other teachings.

The understanding of Dependent Origination is very important to our lives as it prevents us from forming stubborn, inflexible opinions of matters. We would not be hasty in determining if a matter is good or bad as we understand things are subjected to change and everything has its cause and effect. When we look at a particular school rule, we cannot assume that it is unreasonable or ineffective immediately. We must look into the context in which the rules are placed. There must be a cause for the rule to be put in place, and there will be an effect that the rule has on the community. We should make appropriate investigations before coming to a conclusion that is more reasonable. For a person who does not understand Dependent Origination, or interdependence of things, he will have difficulty looking at things in a rational way and he will likely view things from an egoistic

point of view. “Why should things be done this way? I do not think it should be done in this manner.” Some of us may notice that Theravadan monks do not drive cars, and we may think this is a cumbersome rule that they are not allowed to drive. However, if we investigate into the reason for having such a rule, we may form a different opinion. In the days of the Buddha, there was a Buddhist monk who travelled around in a chariot and the villagers who saw this felt this was inappropriate for one who has renounced the world. Back then, cars or chariots are luxurious items and riding in them is considered a form of sensual pleasure. Hence the villagers brought this up to the Buddha and the Buddha put in place a precept that no practitioner shall ride in chariots. However, looking at present day, if we view cars simply as a tool of transportation, use it mindfully to spread the dhamma and not get attached to the car, then we would have mastered and upheld the precept well. Understanding the interdependence of things indeed helps us investigate, question and understand the current situation better.

Understanding interdependence of things also prevents us from being overtly stubborn as we understand that conditions can be altered and the course of events may be changed. It also prevents us from being overly proud or overly humbled because everything is a combination of multiple conditions, and not simply by our doing. In the modern world, many people have become ungrateful. They have forgotten that their achievements today are accumulated from the assistance of so many people. Regardless of whether the assistance was wholesome or unwholesome, or if the situation was pleasant or unpleasant, every single bit has contributed to our growth. If we are not grateful in our training in Buddhism, this proves that our ego has grown to an unimaginable extent. Practicing to be selfless but yet the ego has grown, is this not contradictory?

Our lives are dependent originated, and so is our continued existence. We have depended on so many conditions to survive. Bearing this in mind, we should learn to be compassionate, grateful and respectful. We should understand the interdependence of things and view things more rationally so that we can live our lives happily and enthusiastically.



從佛教的觀點，生命是緣起的。所以佛教不像很多其它宗教那樣熱烈討論宇宙和生命是如何開始。很多人都喜歡爭論這個問題，有的人說生命是神創造的，有的說是進化論，更有人認為是莫名其妙，沒有原因產生的。針對這些說法，龍樹菩薩在《中論》以“四門不生”來破斥這些說法。什麼是“四門不生”？

1) 自生—既是自己生自己，用科學的語言來說叫複製。如果一個人是有實體性的，是有一個不變的自性，那這個自己所生的自己，是有差別的嗎？即使是複製，他是一模一樣的嗎？如果有差別，那就不可能是自己生自己，這個說法顯然是自相矛盾的。

2) 他生—既是自己生他人，生出一個完全不一樣的東西。如果人有一個固定不變的自性，是不可能自己起變化然後產生一個完全不一樣的東西。如果不可能自己生自己，那同樣的也不可能生出另外一個東西來。

3) 共生—既是 $A+B=C$ 。如果A和B都有一個不變的自性的話，共生，當然也是不可能的。

4) 無因生— 莫名其妙，沒有原因生出來的，這當然更是不可能的。

如果一個個體是有自性的，那它不可能起任何變化，就不可能產生別的生命。既然如此，佛教是怎麼說的呢？佛教說“緣生”，一切都是因緣所生。緣生也是 $A+B=C$ ，那它與共生有什麼不同呢？差別在於共生是指有不變的獨立個體的A和B，然後產生截然不同的獨立個體的C。而緣生的A和B本身就是因緣和合所生，是非常多的因緣所促成，而這些因緣條件不斷在變化當中。換句話說，A和B本身也是因緣法，是很多條件所促成，他們沒有永恆不變的自性了，他們的因緣條件隨時在變動中。就因為如此，A與B的結合才可能產生C，而C也是眾緣和合，沒有不變的自性的。所以，緣生和共生的道理是很不同的。

談了緣生，順帶一提，“緣生”與佛教常說的“緣起”又有什麼差別？“緣起”其實是一個規律，而“緣生”是緣起這個規律所造成的現象。換句話說，“緣生”是我們看到的現象，而這個現象背後的規則就是“緣起”。

緣起的定義即“此生故彼生，此滅故彼滅，此有故彼有，此無故彼無”。“此”和“故”存在著一種因果關係。緣起並不像我們想像的那麼簡單，因為一切都是條件性的。既然是條件性的，那到底需要怎麼樣的條件呢？這又有它其中的道理。例如，如果我們把水泥堆積成人的形狀而希望一個人能出現，很顯然這是荒唐，不符合因果的。要建造一間屋子，也有它自己的因果條件。所以，“緣起”的道理不是我們想像那麼淺顯的。

要了解緣起，我們必須要了解三個道理：

- 1) 果從因生— 一切事物的產生必有其原因。
- 2) 事待理成— 因果當中有其必定有的規律和必然



生命的緣起

能融法師

性。例如，人生出來了，一定會有死。做善得善報，做惡得惡報。這個必然性並不是佛陀所創造的，而是宇宙普遍的真理。

3) 有依空立— 一切事物都是空性，即是變動性、條件性的。所有存在物，都是依否定實在性的本性而成立的，都是眾緣和合而現為有的。若有實在的自體本性，那一切是無法成立的。這包括因果理則，因果是緣起法中的事象，它有其必然性，是有組織、流動的因果，而這一切之所以能夠成立皆因為它是空性的。

了解了這三個道理，觀察緣起時才會仔細看到其內在的因果關係。緣起是佛教很重要的一個命題。釋迦牟尼佛兩千五百年前在菩提樹下覺悟真理，他所証悟的真理就是“緣起法”。但是為了方便向世人開示，才解釋了“四聖諦”和“八正道”等教法。因此，四聖諦與緣起法其實並沒有衝突。為什麼會有苦？因為我們的貪、嗔、痴，所以我們會發動不善的行為，造成不善的業。這個循環也是緣起的一個現象。

明白緣起很重要，因為唯有了解緣起，我們才能正確地看待世間一切的因果關係。此外，我們必須了解一切都是空性，都有變動的可能性。我們常常有一種錯誤的觀念，以為一個人做了一件壞事，就永遠壞下去。但了解緣起因果法則後，明白一切是空性，是可以改變的，就可以配合因果的必然規律，提供相應的因緣去改變它。

以上簡單介紹了佛教的緣起觀，接下來談“生命的緣起”。佛陀說，我們的生命是因緣條件而生起，所以說生命是“無始”的。因為一切都是條件性，每一個條件又是很多其它的條件組成的，請問，哪一點是開始的那一點呢？為什麼我們會有生命的輪轉？生命會一直輪轉是因為我們有強烈的“自我愛”，我們沒有人想死的吧？我們都很疼惜自己，並希望自己的生命一直不斷地延續下去，這叫做“後有愛”。我們不但很愛自己，也很愛我們身邊所擁有的一切，這就是所謂的“境界愛”。我們對自我與我所有深深染著，不能透視這個“我”及一切存在物都是空性的，是不斷地改變的。所以，當我們接近死亡時，我們不捨得放下，有一股很強烈的後有愛去追求生命的延續，這就是“無明”。

不了解“我”的真相 + 強烈後有愛 → 無明（推動力）

。明白這些之後，我們就要了解這十二支緣起都是空性，也都有改變的可能，也即是“有依空立”的。就是因為它們是空性，是可以改變的，所以我們才可能隨順因果法則使十二支緣起的流轉還滅。

那到底要如何停止這個輪轉，從而達到超越（解脫）呢？十二支緣起中的“觸”是一個關鍵。經典常說“守護六根（六處）”。當我們的六根（眼、耳、鼻、舌、身、意）跟六境（色、聲、香、味、觸、法）接觸時，我們要以我們的智慧去觀察。例如，當我們的眼睛看到喜歡的東西時，心很容易就被拉去了。可是如果我們明白它的空性後，就不會這樣輕易被動搖，這叫做“明相應觸”。所以，“守護六根”並不是說看不到了，而是看到了心不會動搖，不會被牽引而去，這就是修行。如果我們的六根接觸六境時沒有做出正確的觀察，那很快我們就會有“好的感受”和“不好的感受”，然後很快就會繼續在十二支緣起中輪轉了。如果在“受”時能及時提起正知正念而不被情感的苦樂所迷惑的話，還有可能把這輪轉切斷。但如果已深深生起愛著的話，那就比較困難了！這時我們已主動性的傾向愛染無法自拔，很快的就陷入“取”與“有”，十二支緣起環環相扣就一直接續，想要超越就很難了。

因此，如果我們能在“觸”的時候以智慧觀照，或最遲在“受”的時候及時剎車，提起正念，不生“愛”，“取”，“有”，不結後有的業種，那就有超越輪迴的可能。當我們不染著這個“我”，就沒有“自我愛”和“後有愛”。沒有了這些，也就沒有尋求接續生命的推動力，也沒有無明去滋潤我們的業。因此，當無明滅，則行滅，行滅，則識滅，識滅，則名色滅。如此下去，也就能超脫生命的輪轉。

我們說了這麼多，其實一直都是說著四聖諦的“苦”和“集”。而要超越苦，達到涅槃寂靜，我們要修學佛陀所說的八正道。雖然一般談緣起時好像都在講十二支緣起，這主要是因為十二支緣起呈現一個較完善的解釋。其實四聖諦的“苦”和“集”也說明緣起，還有“惑、業、苦”也是一個緣起的循環。惑是無明，因為惑，所以造業，造業後又引生苦果，苦了又煩惱糊塗，然後就不斷地輪轉，這也是緣起的現象。

希望透過對十二支緣起了解，能夠讓我們對生命有進一步的認識。同時，也了解佛教所說的緣起之內容是非常深廣的。它包含了因果的觀念，也包括了“空”的道理。同時，也包含了“無常，無我”的法則。這就是為什麼我們說佛陀在菩提樹下所証悟的是緣起的真理，但為了教導我們眾生，因而開示了三法印、四聖諦等教法。

了解緣起在我們生活中是非常重要的。不了解緣起的人容易落入對過去的執著。比如有人說：“這個人是很壞的，他就是很壞的，不能改變了。”世間的一切，都是有因有緣。當我們了解緣起的道理以後，看到事情就不會馬上草率的作定論，認為這個是好的還是不好。就好像學校的校規一樣，有一些學校有一些特別的規矩，我們

無明（推動力）+ 貪染 + 過去身口意造的業 → 開始新的生命

每個人都想要生存，都想要生到一個好地方，可是不是每個人都能夠如願以償的，那是因為“業”的影響。比如，一個人想要買一塊地，如果他有很多資產，他就可以買到一片很大的地。如果沒有，他只能買到一塊小地。這個資產就是我們的“業”。

因為“無明”的動力因，再加上過去的業（“行”）做為質料因，當我們遇到適當的因緣，就有“識”出現。這個“識”是執取識，也稱為“阿陀那識”，是由於自我愛而產生的識。因為無明和業的推動力，我們就去執取能讓生命開始的因緣和環境。當“識”出現，就會產生“名色”，就是我們身體的形成。名，是屬於精神，而色屬於物質。當我們在母體內還是肉團的時候，精神（名）已經開始發展了，而肉體（色）也開始漸漸長大。

當這個胎兒慢慢長大，就會產生“六處”，也稱為“六入”，即眼、耳、鼻、舌、身、意。當這六處跟環境接觸時，就會有“觸”。有了“觸”，就會有“受”，會有喜歡/不喜歡的感覺。但我們有了這些感覺，就會有“愛”。當有了“愛”，就會更強烈地去執取它，稱為“取”。這種“取”，包括了對自我的執取，五欲的執取，見解上的執取，和錯誤的戒條的執取。處處貪染執取，忽略了它其實是空性的，這就集成了‘後有’的業種。這就是“有”，也就是能起後世生命的業力，這包括欲有，色有，無色有。有了這未來生命的潛能，那麼，現生死以後，必然又會結新的生命。有了“生”，就免不了會“老”會“死”。以上就是佛陀所開示的十二支緣起，我們的生命就如以上所說一直在輪轉。這十二支緣起一直都是這樣互相影響，延續我們的生命。

無明 → 行 → 識 → 名色 → 六？ → 觸 → 受
→ 愛 → 取 → 有 → 生 → 老死

這環環相扣的十二支緣起亦說明彼此之間的因果關係。此十二支的任何一支是不可以移到別的位置去，因為它們之間有其因果的必然性。這是佛陀在他清澈的思惟中覺察到的輪轉規律。所以無明緣行，行緣識，識緣名色等等都有它們必然的規則和秩序，也是我們之前所說的“事待理成”

不要一下子就認為這些規矩是無理的，我們要仔細的去思考與觀察，或許因為這所學校曾經發生過什麼事，才會制定這樣的校規，其出現必有因有緣。這樣，我們才能做比較明理的判斷。

一個不了解緣起的人常常不能很理智地去觀察事物，而往往以自我的立場去看待每件事情。時常會覺得“為什麼要這樣做，我覺得不需要這樣”。這樣的話就很難以不同的角度去了解事情的真相，也很難覺察它的前因與後果。佛陀所制定的每一條戒都有它的緣起。想必各位都知道南傳的法師一般都不開車，這是為甚麼呢？因為在古代印度擁有車（馬車）的人都是富貴人家，而騎車被視為是一種奢侈的享受。佛陀時代，有一位比丘騎著馬車到處遊玩，村民看到了覺得很不應該，所以就向佛陀投訴。就因為這樣，佛陀制定戒律，出家人不應該乘車，因為這種行為太過奢侈，不適合修道人。但是，在今日的社會，如果我們只把車當作是一種交通工具，不生貪染，甚至利用它為弘揚佛法的工具，那又不同了。所以，了解了其緣起後，就可以知道如何去掌握及守持這樣一條戒律。

了解緣起的人，比較不會執著，不會覺得事事沒有改變的可能。我們五年前所看到的東西到現在不一定還是那個樣子。了解了緣起，我們才會有更正確，明理的處世態度，所以了解緣起的人不會太自卑或太驕傲，因為一切都是靠很多因緣條件促成的。現代人常常沒有飲水思源的觀念，因為我們忽略了我們有今天的成就是有賴很多人的栽培與幫助。不管是順境還是逆境，每一個因緣都幫助了我們成長。有些經驗是很痛苦的，但它卻也助長了我們。有些經驗是很美好的，更值得我們去珍惜。學佛如果無法飲水思源，尊師重道，那證明我們的“我”其實膨脹得很。說自己有修行，卻修到“我”那麼大，不是自相矛盾嗎？

我們的生命是緣起的，我們能夠生存下去，仰賴很多因緣條件的促成。所以我們緊記緣起的道理，把它用在生活中，使我們能夠理智，而又充滿著慈悲，感恩，尊敬他人。這樣，我們的生活才會更快樂，更積極。



The Way leading to Nibbana



by Jim Teoh

The word “Nibbana” - according to Van Narada, a respected monk and scholar of the 20th century - denotes ‘a departure (Ni) from that craving which is called (Vāna) lust-ing’. It is a very simple concept, which has unfortunately been given too much philosophical and meta-physical treatment, to the point now where not many people are clear about its original meaning. The Venerable Walpola Rahula, another well known Buddhist scholar and monk, explains the situation bluntly when he states: “volumes have been written in reply to this quite natural and simple question (i.e. Nibbana or Nivvana). They have, more and more, only confused the issue rather than clarified it.”

I shall try to keep this subject as simple and natural as possible by sticking to the definition of Nibbana as “The departure from craving, which is lust.” We can avoid lengthy philosophical arguments if we adhere to this simple idea.

What then is this ‘craving’ referred to by the Buddha? According to his teachings it is the craving for the things that one sees, hears, smells, tastes, and feels in the body, as well as what one thinks. For example when one sees an object of form, a sensation will arise, which may be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

When a pleasant sensation arises, one yearns for more or for it to last longer. In the case of unpleasant sensations, one wishes them to disappear as soon as possible.

In both cases, if our wishes are not fulfilled, feelings of despair and disappointment arise, which in turn gives rise to unsatisfactory states of mind. As a result, suffering occurs. The teachings of the Buddha are centred on the liberation from this suffering.

The Buddha’s way is sometimes called the way leading to nibbana. The teachings enable us to understand how the mind and body interact to bring about craving, which in turn brings about suffering.

It was mentioned before that with pleasant sensations we develop a liking for the particular object (such as sight, sound, smell, etc) that gave rise to those sensations. This liking becomes greed as we want more and more of it. Likewise, for objects which we dislike, we become averse to them, and so hatred arises. Most, if not all of us, are subject to this greed and hatred in our daily life. We may be greedy for one thing, yet may not

be greedy for other things. Similarly we may hate or dislike one thing over others. The mind is constantly being affected by this pushing and pulling, resulting in a constant state of stress or suffering. Some wise Buddhists therefore came up with a recommendation based on the teachings to enable us to confront this stress and reduce or free us from our suffering.

Most Buddhists from the Theravada School will be familiar with the terms “Dana”, “Sila” and “Bhavana”. This is the threefold practice which will enable a practitioner to be free from suffering.

“Dana” is often translated as generosity or giving. It involves the training and practice of giving one’s material possessions, service, kindness and wisdom to others, depending on one’s affordability and ability. Buddhists are encouraged to be generous without the ego being involved. In other words, when giving, one should not feel that one is in a superior position or expecting gratification in return for giving. When generosity is practiced in this way, greed disappears, allowing a person to practise kindness in a more practical sense.

“Sila” means ethics or morality, or the way one conducts oneself in society. The ethics or morality in the Buddha’s eyes is not focused on fear, retribution or punishment by a higher authority. It is very much unlike the legalistic way morality is imposed through law enforcement. Rather than using fear, the Buddha teaches that the foundation of a good moral life lies in understanding. If we really understand why we should follow certain principles then we do not need to follow this principle blindly, nor will we follow principles merely because others make us follow them. Our moral principle becomes our own principle when we are fully convinced of it.

The basic principles of Buddhist ethics are based on whether the deed one commits is beneficial to others and oneself. There are five basic precepts or training which every Buddhist undertakes, that is, the precepts of not killing, stealing, committing adultery, making false speech and taking intoxicants. One way of looking at the precepts is that firstly it avoids causing harm to others and oneself, and secondly it encourages one to respect life, respect right of proprietorship of others, respect personal relationships, respect truth and respect wisdom. The last precept is important because a mind influenced by intoxicants is not one that can think clearly.



When we consider morality in the above manner, the community or society we live in will be peaceful and stable. Our fellow humans need not be fearful or doubtful of us. This may sound very utopian and impractical, but it is not impossible to establish such values if a person is prepared to do so.

The third and most important practice is “bhavana” or mental development. The Buddha had spent more time preaching about mental development than any other teaching. Although mindfulness enables one to understand how the mind works and how to avoid falling into unsatisfactory states, the ultimate benefit is the development of insight, i.e., to understand the nature of all phenomena and ultimately to live unswayed by craving and lust, that is not affected by one's likes and dislikes.

The Discourse on the Foundation of Mindfulness instructs and explains the way to establish mindfulness. Beginning from being mindful of breathing, one then proceeds to being mindful of the body as its components, activities and decay and to be mindful of the various sensations arising from the body and the mind, pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. It goes further to ask the practitioner to be aware of the various mental states, positive and negative; and finally to be aware of the mental objects such as hindrances (comprising of desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, and doubt) and of the fac-

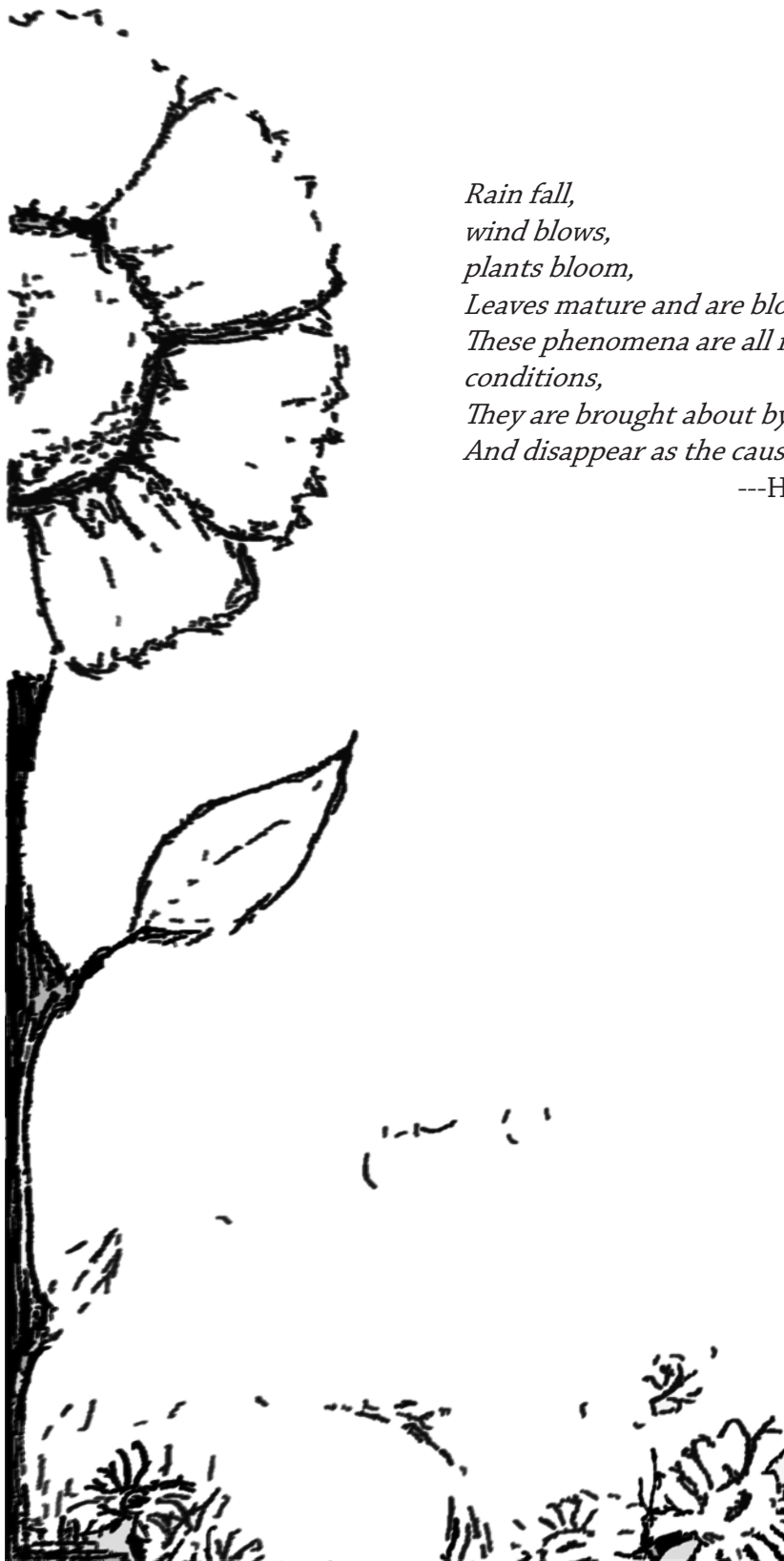
tors of enlightenment. At every stage the practitioner will gain insight of the nature of phenomena arising and fading away.

This, in short, is the meditation practice recommended by the Buddha. As one places mindfulness on one's breathing, concentration arises; when concentration arises, awareness becomes sharper so one can be clearer of the mind's activities. This meditation practice also makes the person more patient because in sitting or walking meditation one has to be aware of one's impatience and to overcome it. Overcoming impatience needs a lot of mental energy, and mindfulness enables one to be aware of flagging energy to renew it when it goes down.

When all these steps are followed, it is natural for clarity of the mind to come about, and for one to develop what is termed as “insight”, that is, the ability to see the true nature of all phenomena. At this moment wisdom will arise. A mind which is wise in this sense is one which has departed from craving.

As Venerable Walpola Rahula puts it, Nibbana “is a natural and simple question”. It is only through ignorance and delusion that many do not want to find the answer.

Members' Contribution



*Rain fall,
wind blows,
plants bloom,
Leaves mature and are blown away;
These phenomena are all interrelated with causes and
conditions,
They are brought about by them,
And disappear as the causes and conditions change.*

---Heart of the Buddha



The Visitor

by Tina Ng

He visits again.
"Go away", I tell him.
He lingers around,
"Leave me alone", I tell him.

"Every time things are going well," I tell him,
"You swoop in and mess everything up."

"If I gain something, you'll make me lose it;
If I build something, you'll tear it down;
If I love someone, you'll take them away;
If I enjoy something, you'll steal the moments away;
Whatever I have, you never let me keep it forever."

"Even when you're not with me,
I feel your presence,
Never really knowing when you'll reappear,
Never really knowing when you'll come to claim what I
have,
Creating an unease that underlies everything in my life."

"I tried securing more and more things
To overcrowd you out of my life,
To build a fortress against your instability.
Yet the more I collected,
The more you took away."

I wished for him to leave and never visit again.

Then came the storm.
It tore down everything I had,
everything I cared for,
everything I was,
and it didn't stop.

"Do something!" I cried desperately to the visitor.
"Come back and take this storm away!"

He didn't come for a long time,
But just when I was losing hope,
He appeared.

The storm cleared,
And slowly I rebuilt my life
with what remained standing.

From then on, whenever he visited,
I would treat him as the guest of honour,
As a friend, as family, and as my guide.

I needed him on my side
In times of difficulties,
So I accepted him
when times were good.

But he never took sides,
And for the things he took,
He always gave back
Somewhere, somehow.

Just when I accepted him for who he is,
And welcomed him into my life,
Without a word,
he left.



Being Wise about Permanence and Impermanence

by Keith Ong

All conditioned things are transient or impermanent (anicca), sorrowful (dukkha) and soulless (anatta). This is a natural law of the universe, and exists whether or not it is discovered or taught by Tathagatas and Buddhas.

In our daily lives, we wish that things were permanent although at a deeper or perhaps subconscious level, we realise that they are actually impermanent. We ceaselessly try to make things more permanent and stable, then feel disappointed when features of impermanence appear. When one adopts the teaching of impermanence in life, one can uphold a peaceful and calm demeanour or mind whether in times of rapture, stress or sorrow.

We could interpret impermanence in both relative and absolute terms. Building a house of bricks with roof tiles would be more permanent than a house of bamboo with a roof of palm leaves. However, be it bricks or bamboo, both houses are bound to change or disappear over time. An unwise person may foolishly use impermanence as an excuse for being lazy or limp. There is no point working hard if the company may go broke one day; why bother to upkeep the car or feed the dog if they are bound to break down or die anyway.

An unwise pet owner may mistreat, abuse or not take care of his/her pet dog; claiming that sooner or later the dog will die regardless of what he does. In that way, they will not be attached or suffer the pain of loss when the pet dies. However, a wise pet owner would take care of his pet well to provide a sense of permanence and stability for his pet, and may try to preserve the health of his pet so that it would live longer. Pets do appreciate the permanence of food and shelter provided and reciprocate the care and love of pet owners. We have heard of faithful pet dogs that return the sense of permanence to their owners, such as guard dogs and guide dogs, who are relied on by their owners. However, should the pet eventually die, someone who realises the impermanence

of life would not become too depressed or overwhelmed with sorrow.

A skilled person would see through the impermanent nature of all conditioned things, but at the same time appreciate the existing conditions as they are, and make the best of what they have been given to work with. Whilst understanding the absolute perspective, we can still be fully engaged at a relative level, living life to its fullest and making the most of every moment. This is penetrating the empty nature of phenomena with no fixation or sense of self, just a richness of experience that comes with awareness and investigation.

We each play many different roles in life, whether as a parent or child, employee, friend or enemy, or all of the above. In different circumstances, a person who was reliable, dependable, ethical and trustworthy in one scenario may become the total opposite in another situation or context. In other words, reliable friends can become untrustworthy enemies. A father who once held his toddler gently as she took her first steps may in his old age lose his ability to walk and be held in return by the same daughter now grown up.

We take care of our family and relatives in the hope that they will live a long and healthy life. A wise person would realise that his loved ones could not live forever, but as long as it is within his power, he would do all that he can to make life for them as pleasant and comfortable as possible. Most parents try to provide a stable and permanent environment for their children to grow up in. They are able to endure much suffering to provide for their children due to their unconditional love. This is a source of comfort and assurance that is invaluable in times of stress when one knows that he can turn to his parents for their support.

Similarly, we would like to regard the temple as a per-

manent place for worship and to achieve calmness. The temple gives stability to followers of the religion. It is an environment where we pay respects to the teacher (Buddha), the teachings (Dhamma), and living examples of the teachings (Sangha). When devotees have problems with their life, work or family, they know that they can always go to the temple for peace, solace and contemplation.

There is no doubt that sometimes we need the "illusion" of permanence to function more easily. This is especially so for those of us who are still learning to come to grips with loss, grief and pain. To fully comprehend and relish the truth of impermanence may take lifetimes of exploration and learning. It is up to us how we choose to proceed on this journey, whether with patience or aversion, kindness or loathing.

When death eventuates, there should be no regrets from hiding behind the cloak of impermanence and as a result, missing out on the full potential that life had to offer. Life is full of ups and downs, and it is helpful to realise that this is the nature of existence in samsara. The chapters of life transpire in cycles. We may try to make good times more permanent, and hope that bad times pass more quickly. A wise person would be able to endure samsara better if he realises that bad times are not permanent, hence they are more bearable; but on the same token, good times are also not permanent, so there is no need to cling on.

In conclusion, it is natural that we strive for permanence in matters of our daily life. However, if favourable things become unfavourable, we should try to realise that all conditioned things are impermanent so that we would not be too overwhelmed with disappointment. In times of despair or difficulty, we can acknowledge that all conditioned things are impermanent, and we know that this too shall pass. It is by welcoming the law of anicca or impermanence like a familiar old friend that we can handle life situations better.



Diseases of the Mind, Cures of the Body

Freedom from the Middle Way

by Alex Serpo

Diseases: Lust, Greed and Gluttony.

Of all attachments, there is no greater attachment than to the body. Journeying through our lives, it is easy to convince ourselves that houses, clothes and cars are merely objects rather than possessions.

However, unlike our other possessions, our bodies overwhelmingly form part of our identities -- your face, your voice, your fingerprints. So easy is it then, to form a strong and lasting attachment to the body.

However, even as we do so the body changes in front of our eyes. Muscles grow and shrink. Skin becomes freckled, wrinkled, aged. Bodies swell to become fat, only to become thin again.

In everyday life we are surrounded by the young, strong and dexterous; as well as the old, the crippled and disabled. Some are born ugly and grow to become beautiful. Some are born beautiful and are made ugly by age, accident or self-harm.

How paradoxical then that we have such strong attachments to our bodies, even while youth is so brief and death so imminent.

What then can be said about the body? Will we walk through life with an athlete's pride or an anorexic's self-loathing?

In life, I think we all know both experiences. Pride and joy in the body's strength and beauty. Disgust and loathing in its ugliness and sickness. We all seek pleasure, we all fear pain. It seems this is the nature of flesh. Joy and pain, lust and disgust, beauty and ugliness.

In this fate we are all fixed. The body will age, grow sick and die. Given that, it seems only fitting to revel in the joys of youth. But as our bodies fade, can we not replace the strength of youth with the wisdom of age? Can our minds grow light and strong as our bodies become frail and weak?

“

Come, bhikkhus, abide contemplating ugliness in the body, perceiving repulsiveness in nutriment, perceiving disenchantment with all the world, contemplating impermanence in all formations.

”

Cures: Mindfulness, The Middle Way

“True love, which is cool, unattached metta, and compassion for others' sorrows, does not grow when people are bound up with greed and sensuality.”

How then, do we approach this impermanent body? Is it fitting to revere the young knowing they will become old? Is it fitting to ignore the old when we know they were once young?

Meditating on the repulsiveness of the body, we overcome lust and an obsession with our personal appearance. By cultivating and meditating on the strength and virility of the body, we can overcome self-loathing and self-mortification. This is the middle way.

Even when we are mindful of these principals, it is still so easy to slip down from the narrow path. How easily is it to become smitten with an attractive person, or to become proud of our own good looks?

We must know then the light that guides the way. For if we love someone only when they are in their prime, do we love them at all? I only know one way to know the middle way. We must make freedom both our goal and our guide.

By mindfully following the middle way, we overcome our attachments to our bodies. When we no longer under or over eat, consuming only wholesome food, then we know freedom from greed. When we look upon bodies with neither pride nor aversion, then we know freedom from lust. When we no long fear sickness or death, then we know freedom from fear.

When we mindfully practise the middle way, then we will know freedom. Trapped in a life where we all know the impermanence of the body, what other path can we follow?



Pete's Diary

by Tina Ng

Fortune tellers may look into crystal balls to see your future, but they only need to read Pete's pocket diary to see his.

Pete's days are mapped out in his diary half a year in advance, each task divided into 30 minute slots detailing the where, when, who, what and how that will fill his life in those 30 minutes. Anything that intrudes this schedule is made to fit within it, or simply ignored as insignificant.

A back up of this diary is set onto Pete's mobile phone and another copy into his computer. His phone beeps regular reminders to him in case he forgets to check his diary; his computer does the same in case his phone forgets. (You can never be too sure.)

He writes with only permanent markers and ink that is guaranteed to never fade away.

Every day he goes to the same coffee shop to order the same cheese and tomato sandwich. The ladies start preparing his sandwich before he even walks through the door.

He has two business suits, three white shirts and one tie. They are all the same. Dear friends of his have tried giving him different ties to "expand his wardrobe". He never wears them because they are "not his style".

Spontaneity has the same meaning to him as bungee jumping without a rope.

He has life insurance, home and contents insurance, private health insurance, comprehensive car insurance, phone insurance, unemployment insurance, superannuation insurance, liability insurance, travel insurance, legal expenses insurance, kidnap and ransom insurance – he even managed to get insurance on these insurances. It is likely that when he dies he will actually be worth more than what he is worth now. If he had pets (which he doesn't because they are too unpredictable) he would certainly have pet insurance.

His home is protected from fire, floods, earthquakes, thieves, accidents, terrorists and wild animals (even though he lives in the city). Yet to feel safe at home he still needs three locks on his door and an all-round security system that notifies the fire station when the smoke alarm goes off in case someone over-roasts something in the kitchen.

Now don't go thinking Pete is obsessive compulsive or abnormally paranoid; he just really needs predictability and permanency as a security blanket for the uncertainties of

life, which of course you know only too well about. Nor is Pete boorish or boring. In fact friends enjoy his company because they know all his jokes and know when to laugh, and they never feel intimidated by him. Also, if Pete says he will be somewhere sometime, his friends know he will definitely be there. He has a stream of friends who come and go in his life, but the continual presence of company gives off a façade that friendship is permanent. Anyway, Pete never goes to funerals nor sends people off at the airport; it's almost as if the absence of a goodbye in his memory means they are somehow still 'around'.

He had a girlfriend once too. He scared her away with his first present to her: a diary. Filled in. By him. Like his. When she left him, he covered his sorrow by hanging out with his mates as if nothing had happened.

I suppose that's how Pete deals with the impermanence of life. He sort of meshes all these individual experiences together so the comings and goings, ups and downs, ebbs and flows, all seem to just be a constant stream of consistency. It's like when he sits by the rocky beach watching the waves crash against the shore again and again. He loves the constancy of the waves, believing that it is a perfect example of permanency. But if he looked carefully, he will see that each wave is different as it comes and it goes in an endless stream of change and flux.

Hang on. What's that?

A golden silk shawl sails through the summer breeze and drops lightly onto the rhythmic waves. It's instantly gulped by a wave but manages to redeem itself and floats lightly above the glistening water.

A beautiful woman with sun kissed locks runs towards the shawl, but stops to admire the shawl dancing with the waves. She lets out a soft laugh, delighted to see her shawl had found its way back to the shore, entangled in the snares of the rocks. Pete can see her hesitating, but is impressed to see her cautiously making her way to rescue her shawl regardless. She gently untangles the shawl, holds it above her head, victorious, as it flaps in the summer breeze. She laughs again, and Pete is mesmerised.

Despite the fact that she is not listed in his diary, nor is she "his type" of woman, nor does he have adequate insurance to cover the risks associated with falling in love, Pete couldn't resist taking the chance to get to know this woman better.

She was called Susie, a free spirit travelling the world to alleviate the sorrows of those she met. Her diary was filled with scribbles from strangers marking their thanks to her and pieces of memorabilia to remind her of her life's work. Her insurance was her good karma and the good friends she met on her journey. She wrote with a lead pencil and colour crayons to remind her of the simple happiness of childhood. She wore whatever she felt like, depending on whichever mood she happened to be in when she woke up.

Meeting Susie, Pete felt he had awakened from a sombre

dream filled with fear and insecurity. He felt he was intimately acquainted with life again and every moment was filled with wonder and preciousness. Being with Susie, he felt he was bungee jumping from one spontaneous moment to the next, and despite the fact that it jolted his schedule out of place, he loved the fullness of the experience.

But the Pete we know was still there, and was starting to feel the insecurity and instability of the relationship. He feared the day when Susie would pack her bags and send a postcard to him from somewhere exotic telling him the relationship was over. He needed commitment, a promise of a forever. So he did the only thing he knew how to express his forever with her.

"Go on, open it." He looked at her intently, trying to read her emotions painted on her face.

"What is it?"

"Open it and you'll see." He could see the excitement in her eyes as she tore open the wrapping.

"Oh...it's a...diary." She flipped open the covers and thumbed through the pages. "1st March 6am – watch the sun rising over the northern beaches." She read. "14th June 7pm – candlelit dinner at our favourite restaurant. 28th August 6.30pm – Bodhi Nite. 3rd September 2pm – 'Celebration of Life' musical. 30th October 8pm – Trick or Treat charity event. 10th November 7am – breakfast in bed. 26th December 9.30am – open presents. 1st January 3pm – New Year's at mum's."

He was expecting her to either accept the commitment with happiness or run away like his other girlfriend. What he wasn't expecting were the tears that started to well in her eyes, rolling down her face and smearing the pages filled with what will be. Slowly, she began to tear the pages one by one, then month by month. September 3rd gone. September 4th gone. September 5th gone. October gone, November gone, December gone.

He watched her, not knowing how to react. Was she angry? Upset?

"What's wrong?" She wouldn't answer him. "Is it too much for you? We don't need to wake up at 6am to see the sunrise if you prefer to sleep in. If you don't like musicals we can do something else. New Year at mum's isn't a must. What is it?"

Finally she stopped. She wanted to talk, but looking at him she couldn't go on. How can she tell the man she loved she can't spend the rest of her life with him because in six months time she would be dead?

"I can't give you what you're looking for." She finally said through her tears. "I can't give you a forever. It's not that I don't want to – it's that I can't."

"Why not?"

She took a deep breath. "I have breast cancer."

The rest of the conversation was a blur to Pete. How can a beautiful and kind person like Susie have...he couldn't even say the word. His logical and scheming mind immediately shot to look for solutions to smooth out the "problem" – surely there is treatment out there with modern medical research so advanced.

"It's too late," Susie replies. "The doctors have done what they can. Look, Pete. The next six months is going to be extremely difficult. Anything can happen. I can't even promise six months. I think...I think it's best if we end it all here instead of dragging it out. It'll be better in the long run."

Then she left. He watched as she walked out the door and closed it shut. He imagined her opening that door again and telling him it was just a joke. He imagined her still with him, and nothing had changed. For the first time in his life, he felt the void. He wasn't ready to let go but impermanence came and yanked Susie out of his life anyway. Suddenly the pains in his heart for his loss gave way to a greater empathy for the pain Susie must be going through now. She shouldn't have to go through this alone.

He got up, grabbed the diary and its torn pages, and ran after her. He rehearsed all the things he wanted to say to her in his head.

"Life is unpredictable; I never planned for you to turn up and brighten up my life but you did. Life is ever-changing; we bloomed from strangers to lovers. Life is impermanent; although you can't be with me forever, at least we have this moment together. I want to walk these last steps with you not because it will lead somewhere someday, but because I love you and cherish..."

Pete couldn't remember whether he saw the bus first or heard the screech of the tyres. He didn't even feel the impact fully until he was lying on the ground and he felt every inch of his body burn. He saw the pages of the days he wished for him and Susie float down upon him like rain.

A passer-by was screaming into the phone. Onlookers watched. The passer-by saw his lips moving and leant in to hear his last words.

"...Susie, I can't promise her a tomorrow but at least we had our many yesterdays..."

The passer-by did pass this message onto Susie, along with the diary and its torn pages.

Susie didn't die in September, but she did go to the 'Celebration of Life' musical, and to the Trick or Treat charity event, and had breakfast in bed as the diary suggested, and opened presents on Boxing Day. In fact, she lived for many years after, and she spent every New Year's Day with Pete's mum in celebration of his life and the joy he left in the hearts of so many. Pete couldn't promise her a tomorrow, but he did give her a happier one full of hope, strength and love.



Stranger on the Beach

by Vickey Chen

'Love' and impermanence – sometimes, they come hand in hand, especially for those who have just had their hearts broken. Friends would say, "Feelings - they are impermanent", "When one door closes, the another one opens", or "Time will heal". Are they true?

Sitting under the burning sun, on my favourite beach, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a pair of dark sunnies, pearls of sweat forming on my arms covered with sun block lotion, toes dug deep into the warm grainy sand, knees pulled close to my chest, throat tight and burning; I could only wish that nobody was staring at me when the hot tears streamed down my cheeks. I have always hated crying – it gives me a headache and my eyes go puffy. Yet, I could not let go of the fact that it has happened; he has left me. He is gone.

"Let go", people say. But, what exactly am I supposed to let go? The sadness that I am feeling now? Or the feelings for him that I have developed over the past few months? Or am I supposed to let go of the person?

Question after questions... But, the questions that matter most to me now are, "Why is this happening to me? Why did things have to change? Why did it become like this? What am I supposed to do now?"

"It is going to be fine", people say. Things change. Yes, I know that things change. Everyone knows that. But, it is not easy to accept change when one is in my situation now, because... because it is NOT going to be fine!

"Hey, are you OK?" A girl asked, as she sat down next to me on the sand. Wiping the tears away with the back of my hand, I told her what happened and what was going through my mind. We chatted for a bit, and then she left after giving me a big warm hug.

I can only remember fragments of what the stranger said, "... cherish every moment", "...experience", "...journey of life", "... life is full of changes", "...nothing is for ever", and "life goes on".

"Life goes on", she said. The root of the pain that I am feeling now is due to desire, and infatuation. Being disconnected from the provider to my desire, I tasted the pain, the longing, the suffering (dukkha, as she called it).

Sitting there watching the sunset, I consoled myself that I will be fine; eventually. Tomorrow is another brand new day. I do not know how much time I will need, or how I am going to do it, but at least I am determined to take the step, to get out of my misery and to move forward. One thing for sure, it will not be easy. But, I know that I can free myself from this 'misery'.





Haiku

by Grasshopper

In Japanese, haiku (俳句) are traditionally printed in a single vertical line, while haiku in English usually appear in three lines, to parallel the three metrical phrases of Japanese haiku.¹ Often focusing on images from nature, haiku emphasizes simplicity, intensity, and directness of expression.² Haiku often consist of two apparently contrasting images that are connected on a deeper level because they are placed in association, in contrast or in relationship, and they comment upon one another, so that the poem synergizes into something bigger than just two images. The aesthetic in haiku is often based in the Japanese aesthetic of wabi-sabi, the impermanence of existence, and the roughness of natural things. The moment of illumination (the haiku moment) is very central to this aesthetic, no matter how the poem is structured technically. Although many haiku are about small things, many also open up into the wider universe of existence, and expand the mind.³

References:

¹ Definition entry of Haiku, Wikipedia <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haiku>>

² "Poetic Form: Haiku", Poets.org online <<http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5782>>

³ "Guest Post: Haiku and its related forms: an introductory essay", Thursday, 26 November 2009, Jim Murdoch, "The Truth About Lies" blog online <<http://jim-murdoch.blogspot.com/2009/11/guest-post-haiku-and-its-related-forms.html>>

light snow shimmers
currawong calls
to the breeze

clear white sky...
lone grey trunk
scraggly bark clings

still air –
small fog of warm
and cold

footsteps crunch
ants walk
round hands clasped

fading light
yellow rays
dust leaps

steel bell tolls!
long sleeves and pants
swinging forward

temple light on
near path's end--
snow mounds both sides

incense smoke pillars
bow once again
eyes open





The Angel wears Prada

by Pojdanai Aun Sukijjakhamin



In the movie 'The Devil Wears Prada', there was a scene where Miranda Priestly, a powerful editor-in-chief, challenged Andy Sachs, her new 'no frills' Personal Assistant, on her disregard towards the world of fashion. While Andy was chuckling over her colleagues deciding between two very similar coloured belts to go with the new dress, Miranda commented on Andy's sweater stating that:

"...What you don't know is that the sweater is not just blue, it's actually cerulean....cerulean quickly showed up in the collections of 8 different designers then filtered down through the department stores...that blue represents millions of dollars and countless jobs"

Many Buddhist practitioners would probably chuckle at the above remark even though what the Miranda character represents might not be far from personalities we see in real life. Consumerism has become a norm in the developed countries where many people have it ingrained in their mind that the more you have, the happier you will be. Developing countries also bought into this way of living to a great extent with the likes of China and other Asian countries spending big money in the name of civilisation.

More than 2,500 years ago, the noble one successfully went against the (typical human) grain. He declared that in order for sentient beings to be happy, we need not look outside – these days, the equivalent would be to get good education, have a nice job, buy a car, find the perfect partner and settle down. Instead, he suggested we look within.

After his enlightenment in India, the teachings of the Lord Buddha, also known as Dhamma, has spread across many countries. Buddhism today has arguably branched out into three main traditions – Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. Each of which has morphed into many distinct schools and practices. Some variations in specific teachings aside, the core teachings remain identical across traditions. In stark contrast, the manifestation of what we regard as part of Buddhism vary greatly from one culture to the next – elaborate rituals, revered statues, even the colour of the monk's robes – all have its own feels and flavours.

Our delusional mind is perhaps too ingrained for many of us. Sometimes it feels as though Dhamma is buried deep down beneath multiple layers of cultural 'colourings'. Many Buddhist practitioners are convinced that a number of things are done out of religious sanctity: Buddha statues are to be worshipped, amulets provide spiritual and physical protection, and merits can be gained mainly

by giving alms to the monks or make heavy donation to the temples or monasteries, the list goes on. These behaviours have been aptly termed by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche as 'spiritual materialism' – materialistic, in this case, in the name of Buddhism. I too have succumbed to my own conditioned mind of a different type. Despite my best attempt, I have been guilty of looking down at fellow Buddhist practitioners who have faith-based practice. As my approach to Buddhism has been from a scholar viewpoint, I was unaware of my own spiritually materialistic nature of a different kind.

It seems that many of us have failed to apply the Buddha's teachings on impermanence to the manifestation of Buddhism itself. As a religion that operates in this physical world, Buddhism as we know it is also subject to change. More than 2,500 years ago is considered a long time by measures of cultural manifestation. Impermanence has been an intrinsic and inevitable part of life. We need to recognise that our relationship with Buddhism has changed from one generation to the next. The key is not to be lost in it, and we need not be attached to a particular 'form' of Buddhism.

In recent years, the Dalai Lama has invested ample amount of time in providing secular viewpoints to the Western society. To suit the appetite of the west, his teachings take the form of universal kindness and compassion. He also makes reference to science as evident in a number of his books such as 'the Universe in a Single Atom' to cater for such a knowledge-based society. Regardless of how we feel personally, we need to find ways to view his approach as yet another manifestation of the Dhamma. As long as civilisation exists, our human mind will 'mold' the Buddha's teachings into various shapes and forms into the future.

Despite the Buddha's teaching given over 2,500 years ago, it seems that more Buddhist practitioners unknowingly have been trapped in their own habits to this date. We allow ourselves to follow the grain despite our declaration to go against it. It is time we stopped looking outside at the different 'skins' of Buddhism. Instead, we need to look within – and look right through to the core teachings. We need to recognise that there are many paths to the same truth – sectionwise (Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana), methodwise (faith, wisdom) or otherwise. Recognise that Buddhism can take many shapes and forms, and is subject to change. Recognise that despite all this, the core teaching itself is Akaliko – timeless. At its purest form, Buddhism has no amulets, no incenses, and no monasteries. There exists only Dhamma.



Everything Has Its Time

by Lillian Ong

Those who have had the fortune to be young at the turn of the millennium are often dismissively labelled the “throw away” generation. This is supposedly a reference to our increased disposable incomes as well as our inability to recall a world without disposable nappies, cameras, pens and batteries. Analysts are quick to point out that many of us upgrade our computers on an annual basis, that we prefer to spend instead of save, that we favour travelling as opposed to settling down, and that we do not like to miss out on opportunities even if they come at the expense of common sense. Life in the twenty-first century is supposedly built around principles of change and spontaneity.

We are the generation who laugh at our parents for holding onto their pen-and-paper, non-electronic address books, for hoarding their 1970’s clothes, and for generally clinging to ways of life which we classify as outdated. “Luddite! Amish! Slowpoke!” we cry. (Or, “Come on, mum and dad, everyone uses Skype these days!” when we are not feeling frustrated that they have asked us how to send email attachments for the fifth time that week.)

However, what we do not always realise is that we are doing much the same thing – clinging and hoarding – on an even grander scale.

We are the generation who feel the need to Tweet our actions every five minutes, to photograph our dinner before it gets eaten and to video every funny moment to show off later. It is merely because our hoarding takes up less space that it is less visible, and thus easier to ignore. Now that cameras are no longer the size and weight of bricks, it is no longer a chore to drag them out and about. Thousands of photos can now be stored on a card smaller than a postage stamp. A music collection that once took up several rooms can now fit in a pocket. Even various email hosts have adapted so that we need never delete another message again. We are warned by our elders upon uploading unsavoury photographs that, “The internet is forever”. Paradoxically, many forms of advancing technology actually allow and encourage us to preserve the past more effortlessly and comprehensively than before.

But is this obsession a particularly healthy one? There are a couple of reasons why we should stop to think about the way many of us lead our lives.

Firstly, shouldn’t there be some things that we cherish for a moment? If you could revisit something on-demand, wouldn’t that cheapen its value? A common saying among slaves-to-fashion is that “if you buy a \$200 jacket and wear it a hundred times, the price-per wear is only

\$2, making it actually a bargain”. If we could watch a particular concert (to which tickets cost \$200) 100 times, because someone had illegally recorded it, sure, we would get value for money, but it would also be 100 times less special. The thought that we can re-live happy moments through technology can make us forget to value the present as much as we should. The quintessential example of this is the person who spends an entire party taking photos of everyone, and as a result has far less time to sit down and simply talk to their friends. Or, perhaps, the person who sits at a concert writing down critiques and does not have the chance to wholly immerse themselves in the theatrical experience. Our parents hand-picked their most precious things to show off to future generations, but we have so much in terms of photographs and videos and blog entries and vlogs and Tweets that our children would take a lifetime to wade through everything we have collected. Maybe the idea is that, when we are old and have Alzheimer’s, we will have a perfect record of the past to refer to. But I think this is a pretty shoddy excuse because life can neither guarantee that we will get demented, nor that our records will survive an apocalyptic incident such as computer crash.

Secondly, the latest technology allows us countless second chances at things. You no longer have to worry about getting a photograph right the first time, because unlike a film camera, it costs nothing to take three extra digital shots. If you accidentally delete something from the computer, you have both the “undo” key and a “recycle bin” at your disposal. Suddenly, we can all convincingly say to ourselves, “nothing is lost forever”. But unfortunately, this isn’t how the real world operates. As one facebook group eloquently says it, “Friends are like potatoes – when you eat them, they die.” Real-life friends cannot be added and deleted with the flippancy of social networking sites.

Believing that you can always save something for later, come back to it a second time around, can have two unsavoury consequences. The first is procrastination and time-wasting, which I am sure everyone reading this is familiar enough with for me to skim over. The second is missing the opportunity altogether because the “saving” is not as foolproof as we thought.

Evidently, the digital age philosophy of saving everything diminishes the inherent value of special moments and creates a romanticised world of second chances. There is the possibility that the things we save will never be looked at again – who knows if our entire planet will still be around tomorrow? – so why do we continue to do it? What is the point of saving everything for later?

The point is that despite what we say, our memories are becoming even more and more important to us. Our recognition that our identities are little more than a bundle of past events is growing. Of course, I could open up a philosophical debate here about whether it is memories themselves, or what actually links the memories, that matters more, but no matter which side you take, it is impossible to discount the significance of memory in building the self. It is only human to need to have to stand on something solid – like a collection of memories.

All right, so what can we all do about it? I know I would definitely fall under the category of “addicts” and giving up my daily blogging, photography and tweeting would give me some serious withdrawal symptoms. But perhaps being aware of it is the first step. It is definitely a solemn reminder of the impermanence of life that will prevail no matter how much we try to fight it with our shiny new technology.

I am going to end on a pop culture reference. A recurrent theme in science fiction is that of time travel – the ultimate form of memory preservation. Not only can you just look at a scene from a distance through a photograph or hear it from an audio recording, you can fully interact – taste, smell and touch. The ultimate in long-standing time travel sagas is the Doctor Who television series. To “the Doctor”, who travels through time and space in his “TARDIS” time machine, existence is just a giant DVD which he can fast-forward and rewind, and skip to favourite moments which have become like “chapters”. But he doesn’t spend all his time in the past, he discourages characters from trying to use time travel to bring back things that have been lost, and he recognises that our actions are permanent making the past, in a way, gone forever.

As one of his companions, a human named Sarah-Jane Smith, eloquently says,

“

The universe has to move forward. Pain and loss, they define us as much as happiness or love. Whether it’s a world, or a relationship... everything has its time. And everything ends. ”





Challenging Impermanence

A Simple, Old Fashioned Love Story

by Joffre Balce

On their 10th anniversary, my mum and dad bought each other matching wristwatches. Fifty years later, on their 60th anniversary, they still had both their watches on, or did they? My mum was more careful with her watch and to this day has changed no parts, thanks to regular maintenance and upkeep. Well, my dad travelled a lot and, because of the nature of his job, roughed things up as well so the watch did break down every so often through the years, requiring major repairs and changes of parts – from the outside to the inside -- until one can say it has no original parts anymore but made up of sheer replacements.

There are many perspectives to this story. On the topic of gender, one may infer women take better care of things than men. On the science of economics, one may conclude that regular maintenance and care are more cost-effective than major repairs and parts replacement. On the analogy of relationships, one can compare preserving as much of the bond as one can with repairing – even replacing – what has been broken and moving on in life.

The topic of impermanence opens viewpoints within viewpoints as well.

Is my dad's watch the same one my mum gave him on their 10th anniversary? Compared to my mum's, many will say it definitely is not, since it consists of 100% (let's assume this) replacement parts. Following on from this argument, if a human being's cells die and are replaced by entirely new ones after a period of time, the friends you last saw, say ten years ago, are not the same friends you will be meeting today. In addition, because some experiences and events can alter a person's personalities drastically, the difference may be made more apparent as you catch up on stories and updates. However, despite these differences, you may still be pleasantly surprised to find that the essence of the friendship has not changed with time, and would most likely continue this way into the next reunion, even if it means another ten years later.

Back to my parents' story, my mum made no fuss by saying "If you love me, you would have taken better care of the watch like I did mine." It seemed that the watch per se was not important to her despite being the 10th anniversary present mum bought for dad. Rather than speculate, I asked mum why she was not too sensitive about how dad cared for his watch and she said, "Your

dad is different from me. Because of the nature of his job, he travels much to harder places around the country and have even gotten into near fatal accidents. I never even asked about the watch because it was enough for me to see him home safe with the children. Seeing the watch on your dad's wrist was a bonus."

For my dad, there was no doubt. It is the same timepiece, although physically, it is not the same watch. Even the watch company will contest his opinion, considering the casing was replaced after he smashed it jumping from a bus that careened into a ravine. It was cheaper to buy a new watch – the company advised him -- but something in him wanted to salvage whatever parts and pieces that were left of the original, or even parts and pieces that had been replaced due to continued wear and tear over the passage of time. For him, some things represented by the symbol of that relationship – that watch – do not change, like the love he nurtured for my mum; from the time they met, got married, faced the test of time together, bore and raised children and, eventually, grow old together. Although their appearances have changed, even their feelings and conditions in the relationship, there was an unchanging thread that continued to bind them.

A little after their 66th anniversary, my dad passed on but it has not stopped my mum from continuing to nurture that love. As she never made it the condition that my dad care for his watch the way she did hers, on the same note, she never made it a condition for my dad to be alive in order for her to continue loving him.

Their story leads me to personal insights & questions. If "Everything is impermanent!", so is this statement. Impermanence, like many things we tend to label as reality, may be simply a perspective from which to understand, cope with and accept change in life. Things and people come, stay and go. So, does permanence serve a similar but opposite purpose as well? Although many challenge its practicality and reality, permanence has served as a perspective that enables mere mortals -- like my parents and myself -- to face the tests of time and for people to love one another without condition, across distances or even after youth has faded away and life has gone from the beloved's body.

What is your perspective on this?

Whenever we talk about impermanence, the first thing that comes to mind is change. We have learnt that all things are impermanent and subject to change; whether it is our self or our surroundings, society or nature, physical or emotional. This is often well-accepted and understood but many of us still fear change, so why is that? Change can be thought of as the transition between an end and a new beginning. While a new beginning sounds optimistic, it is the negativity of dealing with the end that is difficult.

Just as the Buddha invited every individual to self-investigate and explore the Dhamma, I have learnt many lessons on impermanence through my experiences and this is my story.

The impermanence of all things compounded

"This story starts as just another Saturday night in the month of May. I remember sitting in a café in Randwick, chatting with friends over a cup of latte. It was a stressful week but at least the weekend was here, a time to unwind and catch up. Little did I expect that events had been unfolding more than 6,000 kilometres away, on the island city of Singapore that would soon change my life and my perspectives on life.

A few years ago, my maternal grandmother, who was also my only living grandparent, had come down with a chronic illness that the doctors were unable to diagnose. She became weak and was put on several medications to relieve her symptoms. Nevertheless, she always carried herself with dignity and strength, always remaining peaceful and happy. I always believed that she would eventually overcome this. But it all soon changed when my parents called me on that Saturday night, telling me that she had been hospitalised. I immediately made arrangements to fly back to be by her side. Two weeks later, she passed away peacefully, surrounded by her family and loved ones."

In the same way as when the Buddha told a grieving Ananda just before his parinibbana, "...with all that is dear and beloved there must be change, separation, and severance. Of that which is born, come into being, compounded, and subject to decay, how can one say: 'May it not come to dissolution'? There can be no such state of things..." we have all experienced loss in one way or another; whether it is the death of a loved one, the end of a relationship or even the breaking of a cherished item.

The experiences of impermanence

"When I was faced with my grandmother's passing, I was unsure of what to feel as a Buddhist. Drawing from the lessons on impermanence, I believed that I was not meant to have any feelings of sadness or sorrow. If I had understood that all things are impermanent, why should I have any negative thoughts or feelings? Furthermore, I brought it upon myself to stay strong for my family. Throughout my grandmother's wake, I did not shed a single tear and maintained a strong front. However on the final day, as we approached the crematorium, I suddenly burst into tears, and I was filled with emotions and



Lost in Impermanence

by Bernard Chen

thoughts I had not expected."

The Buddha did not teach about the lack of emotions but rather our attachments to our thoughts and feelings. In dealing with grief, many people are unsure about what they should or should not feel; there is no right or wrong way to grief. Every individual handles loss differently and some might take longer than others. The important thing is to acknowledge your feelings. We frequently bottle up our feelings and try to hide them from others because we believe that it is a sign of weakness. Yet, it takes a lot of courage to face sadness and sorrow. The intensity of what we feel often shows how much the person or object means to us and how much we care.

When it rains, it pours...

"Within a few days after my grandmother's wake, I flew back to Sydney as soon as I could because I was doing my Honours year and time was valuable. It was stressful but I did not want my parents to worry about me, so I acted like I always did – that everything was normal. Underneath my composed exterior, there was a torrent of emotions and feelings. Anger, denial, stress, sorrow and many other emotions flooded my mind. However, I had no one to share these feelings with. I could not tell my family in Singapore as I did not want them to worry. My friends here in Sydney were busy with their own studies and were unsure of how to talk to me, out of fear of saying the wrong things. Without an outlet, I was confused by the constant flux of emotions and became highly temperamental. I felt alone in the midst of a million people, all running by me as my world came to a standstill. Depression set in soon after and I wanted all of this to end."

When talking about grief, many people like to refer to the Kübler-Ross model of the five stages of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance. However, as mentioned before, every individual deals with grief differently. It is not necessary that a person undergoes all five stages or experience them in a particular order. Similarly, different people take different length of time to go through each stage.

Yet, it is extremely helpful for the mind to be able to identify and be aware of what it is going through. When faced with a significant loss, many thoughts and feelings

can arise and sweep us away. Being mindfully aware of our thoughts and feelings helps prevent us from getting caught up and lost in them. Furthermore, through acknowledging and understanding our thoughts and feelings, we will be able to convey our emotions better to those who are there to listen. Some of the common emotions that arise from grief include: shock and disbelief at the abruptness of what has happened, sadness and sorrow over the loss, guilt for not having said or done enough, anger and blame towards self or others for the unfairness and fear of the uncertain future ahead.

It is important to remember that we are not alone. When dealing with grief, feel free to seek support from those around you: friends and family, religion, counsellors or support groups. Being alone with your emotions can frequently be overwhelming and lead to a deeper sense of loneliness and depression. Give yourself time to heal and overcome your grief, ignoring a problem does not make it go away.

Finding strength

"Even today, I am unsure how I found the strength to carry on through the pain. But whenever I was ready to give up, a kind and gentle voice in my head would tell me, 'There is more than sorrow to be experienced and lessons to be learnt. Running away from reality is the easy way out but there is nothing to be gained, only lost.' And so, each time I would find renewed strength and inspiration to carry on. I eventually completed my Honours and dedicated my thesis to the memory of my late grandmother. Against all odds, I accepted my grandmother's passing, found the strength to carry on and graduated with First Class Honours."

As with all things in life, it is always tempting to take the easy way out. However, when it comes to grieving, there is no easy way out. It takes strength, compassion and effort to deal with and accept the loss. Find the strength you need in those who care for you, those who share your pain or even in the memory of whom or what was lost. Whenever it feels like the pain is too much to bear, hold your feelings and thoughts with compassion. If it helps, say a prayer of compassion for yourself, your feelings and your emotions then extend that compassion to whom or what was lost, to those you care about and to those who are also experiencing pain. Take one step at a time and deal with each emotion as it arises.

When faced with loss, we may often feel that there is a sudden void in our life or the lack of closure. This feeling of emptiness can often create a sense of loneliness and helplessness. In addition, there might be uncertainty of what to do with the feelings of love and attachment that have been displaced after the loss. The key is to take all these feelings and thoughts that arise and transform them into something positive such as loving-kindness towards yourself and those around you. Find a productive outlet for your emotions and transform your thoughts into something tangible like writing a journal or helping in a cause or charity organisation, being able to help others in need can be highly beneficial to the healing process.

At the end of the day, ...

As recorded in the Maha-paranibbana sutta of the Digha

Nikaya (Collection of Long Discourses), when faced with the Buddha's passing, the arahants (or enlightened ones) contemplated mindfully, "Impermanent are all things compounded. How can this be otherwise?"

While we are familiar with the teachings and concepts of impermanence, dealing with the loss of someone or something we cherish can still be a difficult process. Nevertheless, just as the Buddha taught about suffering and the path to ending suffering, we can learn to deal with our grief by applying practices of mindfulness to our feelings and emotions.

1. **Acknowledgment** – The teachings of the Buddha are not nihilistic or void of feelings and emotions. Accept that various feelings or emotions can arise from losing someone or something we cherish. Nonetheless, what everyone experiences can be very different and so there is no right or wrong; but instead, acknowledge your own feelings and give yourself space to experience the emotions.

2. **Support** – Grieving alone can be very depressing and emotionally draining. The sense of loneliness and emptiness often magnifies the unpleasant feelings and emotions that arise. Whether it is family, close friends, religious teachers or counsellors, accept some form of support to help you deal with the loss.

3. **Awareness** – It is easy to lose yourself and be swept away by the feelings that arise. Through the practise of mindfulness, we can avoid this by being aware of the thoughts that surface in our minds, not rejecting them but just being aware of them. This also allows us to communicate them better to whoever is listening.

4. **Compassion** – The key to healing any wound is time and love, however much it takes. Time can help you forget but you need plenty of love to truly heal any wound; love for yourself and those around you. Hold your thoughts and yourself with compassion and extend that compassion to all those you care about and all the people who are also experiencing the pain of loss.

5. **Transformation** – Following from the practise of radiating compassion, replace all your unpleasant feelings with thoughts of compassion. Allow your capacity for love and compassion to transform all your emotions and feelings into inspiration, strength and motivation. Inspiration to do something for yourself and others, strength to achieve what you wish and motivation to overcome all odds.

It can be tough to see a person you care about deal with loss and grief, especially being uncertain of what to do or say. You can feel awkward or helpless out of fear of intruding, saying the wrong things or making them feel worse. Although nothing can be done to take away the pain, it is possible to make it easier for the person to heal by providing care and support. There is often no need for us to provide solutions, but just being present and providing a listening ear can be a major aid to a grieving person. Remember that time and love heals all wounds, while there is nothing that you can do about time, you can provide love and compassion.



The Ebbs and Flows of Experience

Composed by Edward Roy Gubbay
Lyrics by Tina Ng

It comes, it stays, it gives, it goes,
Ebbs and flows of experience.

Like the flowers of spring after the fall of autumn,
Like the candlelight against the gentle breeze,
Like the morning dew vanishing into sky,
This too will pass.

Just as you can't step in the same river twice,
Nor stop the tides of change.
Each moment is unique ,
And never stays the same.

It comes, it stays, it gives, it goes,
What then exists for all time?

If we live each day like its our last,
If we care for others like they'll go now,
If we use things like there's no more,
How different would our life be.

We would not take anyone for granted,
Nor waste a single moment in life.
We wouldn't be put down by challenges,
For we know.

With every hurdle jumped,
That's another leap forward.
With every mountain climbed,
That's a conquered peak.
With every river crossed,
That's another drift closer to the great sea.

This is the miracle of impermanence,
This is why I can laugh even if today was my very last
day.



無常的曙光

庄祥緣與黃凱怡

The Dawn of Impermanence

by Ian Ch'ng and Khai Yi Ng

春季花開，秋天花謝
誰能挽回過去的一切
日出日落，月圓月缺
誰來捉握逝去的歲月

In spring, flowers bloom; in autumn, flowers wither
Who is able to retrieve all that is gone?
Dawn to dusk; full moon to crescent
Who will retain the time that have past?

人聚人散，緣起緣滅
如何面對一切的改變
曾經擁有，終會失去
如何迎接明天的來臨

reunion and separation; the arising and falling away of
causes and conditions
How should we face the changes ahead?
What we once possess, will be lost eventually
How should we embrace the coming of tomorrow?

季節的變幻，是否曾讓你感嘆？
滄桑的變化，是否曾讓你感傷？

Have the changing of the seasons ever stirred up your
emotions?
Have the many changes in life ever brought you sorrow?

我們活在這個無常的世界里
就算感傷，我們又能怎麼樣？
學會珍惜，在這生命中的每一刻
認識無常，才是真正的智慧
也許我們都曾經迷失了自己
看清無常，尋找正確的方向
這世界上沒有什麼會永恆不變
接受改變，才能真正的快樂

We live in the world of impermanence
What can we do even if we feel sorrow?
Learn to treasure every moment in this life
Understanding impermanence is the way to achieving
true wisdom
we may have lost ourselves in the past
Seeing the truth of impermanence and to find the right
direction
There is nothing in this world that remains unchanged
forever
Accepting change is the way to true happiness



Photo Gallery

*Impermanence~
Non-self~
Nibbana.*

---Heart of the Buddha





Orientation Week

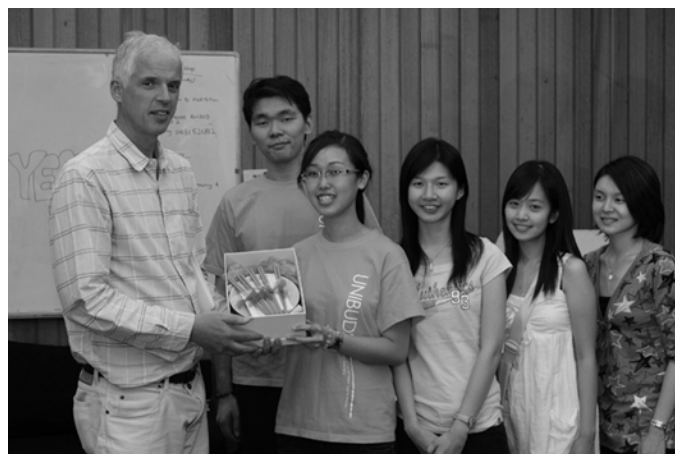


Orientation Picnic





Cook of The Year



Vesak Celebration





Potlucks





Winter Retreat





Summer Retreat





Bodhi Nite



Bodhi Nite 2009 - UMBUDS UMSW



Bodhi Nite





Annual General Meeting



Graduations



Through true honesty,
deeply believe
that all sentient-beings are one.

That all beings have the same
true nature,
wisdom,
virtue.

---Heart of the Buddha





Membership List

Honorary members

Ching Liang	Lim
Quee Kin	Saw
Kway Yung	Lee
Wai Loon	Teng
John Joon Hu	Ng
Graeme	See
Kah Loon	Wong
Yen Lee	Ong
Michael	Kiddle
Tracy	Weerasinha
Desmond	Ong
Merry	Chandra
Chien Hoong	Gooi
Agus	Santoso

Associate members

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Susian	Teh
Cheng Hiang	Lee
Julian	Craig
Andrew	Wan
Simon	Garrod
Rosiana	Lim
Amy	Chung
Richard	Thorpe
Jessica	Ang
John Andrew Richard	Ionneil
Wilsen Lius	Lau
Kate Yi	Zhang
Tina	Ng
Nobel	Barua
Wai Wai	Kwong
Eng Leong	Ang
Henry	Sinjaya
Tanakaan Niky	Phongwarin
Alex	Sebby
Jack	Shi
Yu Ang	Tan
Forrest	Caroline
Michelle	Pradie
Wei Yin	Chen

Ordinary members

Christian	Tanadinata
Mahesh	Supramaniam
Kai Yi	Giam
Khai Yi	Ng
Lucky	Joeng
Kok Wai	Chan
Yong Khing	Tan
Wee Han	Lim
Dana Veronica	Slaven
Teresa	Hong
Albert	Ng
Juan Lyn	Ang
Gilbert Hock Beng	Foo
Ming De	Teh
Serene	Leow
Chin Soon	Goon
Yee Herng	Yeo
Alex	Voevoda
Kah Fai	Kwan
Ayu	Liana
Lany Lee La	Argualo Birbano
Vinuri	Ariyasinghe
Jue April	Zhao
Henry	Makgawinata
Chen Wei(Becky)	Ji
Lilian	Ong
Jian Ping	Bai
Kia Sheng	Chew
Ian Xiang Yuan	Ch'ng
Baghya Nirmani	Wijenayake G
Jane	Beh
Hadi	Kusuma
Peter	Djimric
Philip	Porter
Ivy	Lam
Anthony De	Rosa
Chris	Ge
Victor Nicholas	Szmidt
Shi Ying	Ooi
Bill	Reda
Chendria	na
Dilshan	Ariyarathna
Adeline	Sugianto

Alan
 Patrick
 Ying Sean
 Saeed
 Mabel
 Cadence
 Mei Ling
 Shin Hau
 Bing Sen
 Tze Shen
 Ivan
 Alex
 Ka Yee Kelly
 Linus
 Adeline
 Xin Yi
 Alvin
 Evelyn
 Henner
 Bradley James
 Meikana
 Ju Bee
 Mandy
 Kittikhun(Pele)
 Jakree
 Mandy
 Yee Yee
 Joffre
 Vickey
 Erica
 Erica
 Elisa
 Hong Gee
 Qi Hong
 Ka Ling Kathy
 Charlie
 Wu Chuan
 Pang Ping
 Chern Chuen
 Weng Sern
 Shi Nee
 Yon Xian
 Hans
 Joon Wayn
 Gau Wei

Chan
 Tang
 Lim
 Afshar
 Ting
 Brown
 Teoh
 Khoo
 Koh
 Koh
 Yu
 Surace
 Wong
 Meng
 Lukmantara
 Ng
 Phua
 Tan
 Kampwerth
 King
 Lizadjohry
 Khaw
 Pang
 Kittiaran
 Koosukul
 Karki
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 Chen
 Leonar
 Kang
 Kang
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 Lim
 Wong
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 Ong
 Wee
 Lee
 Loh
 Loh
 Koh
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 Cheong
 Hum

Uyen
 Shan
 Bo Jin
 Ying Ying
 Hiang Yang
 Jing
 Shi Yun
 Chen Sen
 Sam
 Jethro Octavianus
 Foh Fan
 Vincent
 Joanne(Jojo)
 Kuan Yen
 Iris
 Kristy

Nguyen
 Luo
 Liu
 Bu
 Heng
 Hua
 Chen
 Au
 Varmah
 Wijaya
 Yong
 Lim
 Aresty
 Tan
 Wong
 Bradley





Spiritual Reference

Patrons

Ven Tsang Hui
Mahayana
Hwa Tsang Monastery
29 Mackenzie St, Homebush West NSW 2140
Ph (02) 9746 6334

Ven. Chao Khun Samai
Theravada
Wat Pa Buddharangsee
39 Junction Rd, Leumeah NSW 2560
Ph (02) 4625 7930

Student Organisations

Non-Sectarian

MacBuddhi (Macquarie University Buddhist Association)
Box 16 Student Council, Macquarie University, North Ryde
NSW 2109

Unibodhi (University of Sydney Buddhist Society)
Box 100 Holme Building, University of Sydney, Camper-
down NSW 2122

UTS Buddhist Meditation Society (University of Technol-
ogy
Sydney)
PO Box 3210, Broadway, NSW 2007

Charles Sturt University Mitchell Buddhist Group (MBG)
c/o Mitchell Association of Student Councils
CSU LPO P. O. Box C227 Bathurst NSW 2795
Ph 0414 392 426, Fax (02) 6338 4576

Library and Information Services

Buddha Dhamma Education Association Inc.
Non Sectarian
78 Bentley Road, Tullera NSW 2480
Ph: (02) 6628 2426

Buddhist Council of New South Wales
Non-Sectarian
Level 1, 441 Pacific Highway, Crows Nest NSW 2065
Ph: (02) 9966 8893

Buddhist Information Centre
Info Service
Shop 90 BBK Evans Ave, Eastlakes NSW 2018
Ph: (02)9669 3053
City Centre: Shop 2, 242 Elizabeth St, Surry Hills NSW
2018
Ph: (02) 9280 0000

Buddhist Library and Meditation Centre
Library
90-92 Church St, Camperdown NSW 2050
Ph: (02) 9519 6054



Glossary

For the convenience of readers, a list of explanation for the Pali terms used in the Magazine has been included. These explanations have been adopted from two different sources namely Buddhist Dictionary (Nyanatiloka) and Seeker's Glossary of Buddhism (Sutta Translation Committee of the US and Canada). Care has been taken to select the simplest and best possible explanation of the terms and the Editor apologizes for any inaccuracy of term explanations rendered here. Wherever possible, the English, Pali and Sanskrit version of the terms are provided so that readers could cross-reference between the languages that they are familiar with.

Note on Abbreviations:

eng – English
pl – Pali
skt – Sanskrit
ch – Chinese
tib – Tibetan

Abhidhamma (pl) One of the three baskets in the Tipitaka. It is largely a commentary on the sermons or suttas, and subjects them to analysis. Abhidharma (skt)

Anatta (pl) See Non-self (eng) Anatman (skt)

Anicca (pl) Impermanence.

Arahat (pl) Holy one; liberated being; one who has destroyed all his mental impurities. Arhat (skt)

Bhanaka (pl) A person who mastered the skill to memorise long passages and have the ability to recite these passages from memory.

Bhavana (pl) mental development; meditation. The two divisions of bhavana are the development of tranquility (samatha), corresponding to concentration of the mind, and the development of insight (vipassana), corresponding to wisdom.

Bodhi (pl) Being awakened from the slumber or stupor (inflicted upon the mind) by the defilements and comprehends the Four Noble Truths. Enlightenment (eng)

Bodhisatta (pl) Literally, 'Enlightenment-being'. Those who aspire to Supreme Enlightenment and Buddhahood for themselves and all beings; also for anyone who has developed the Bodhi Mind – the aspiration to save oneself and others. In the Pali Canon, it is used specifically to designate Siddhattha Gotama in the time before he achieved full Enlightenment. Bodhisattva (skt)

Buddha (pl/skt) A Supremely Enlightened One, Awakened One. The term Buddha generally refers to the historical Buddha Sakyamuni who lived in India more than 2500 years ago and founded Buddhism. 'Buddhas' naturally refers to all Enlightened Beings.

Buddha-nature (eng) According to the view of one of the Mahayana schools, Buddha-nature is the true, immutable and eternal nature of all beings. Since all beings possess Buddha-nature, it is possible for them to attain Enlightenment and become a Buddha, regardless of the level of existence they occupy. Tathagata-Garbha (skt)

Dalai Lama (tib) The word 'Dalai' means 'great ocean' in Mongolian, and was a title granted to the third Grand Lama of the Gelugpa School in 1587 by Gusri Khan, a Mongol prince. There have been 14 Dalai Lamas; the current 14th Dalai Lama is "HH the XIVth", Gyalwa Tenzin Gyatso.

Dependent Origination (eng) The chain of conditioned arising; causal genesis. The process, beginning in ignorance, by which one keeps making life after life of suffering for oneself. Also a fundamental Buddhist doctrine of the interdependence of things. It teaches that all beings and phenomena exist or occur only because of their relationship with other beings or phenomena. Paticca samuppada (pl); Pratitya samutpada (skt)

Deva (pl/skt) A divinity or god; a heavenly being. Devas, including Hindu gods, are believed to inhabit the heavens above the human realm, but are still unenlightened, bound to Samsara and subject to birth and death.

Dhamma (pl) This word has several meanings: (a) The teachings of the Buddhas (generally capitalized in English); (b) Law, doctrine; (c) Things, events, phenomena. Dharma (skt)

Dhammapada (pl/skt) The most famous scripture in the Pali Canon, this sutta exists in two versions; i.e. the Theravada and the Mahayana. The many translations of the Dhammapada has given it worldwide popularity, representing for Buddhism what the Tao Te Ching is for Taoism.

Dukkha (pl/skt) Suffering; unsatisfactoriness. One of the three basic characteristics of existence and the first Noble Truth. The term dukkha is not limited to painful experience, but refers to the unsatisfactory nature and the general insecurity of all conditioned phenomena, which, on account of their impermanence, are all liable to suffering; and this includes also pleasurable experience.

Emptiness (eng) The concept that entities have no fixed or independent nature. This idea is closely linked to that of dependent origination. Sunnata (pl) Sunyata (skt)

Enlightenment (eng) Being awakened from the slumber or stupor (inflicted upon the mind) by the defilements and comprehends the Four Noble Truths. Bodhi (pl)

Five Aggregates (eng) These are the five aspects in which the Buddha has summed up all the physical and mental phenomena of existence: matter, consciousness, perception, feeling and reaction. Aggregates: Khandha (pl) Skandhas (skt)

Five Precepts (eng) The five moral rules, which are binding on all Buddhist laymen, are: (1) Abstaining from killing any living being, (2) from stealing, (3) from unlawful sexual intercourse, (4) from lying, (5) from the use of intoxicants. Panca sila (pl)

Four Noble Truths (eng) The briefest synthesis of the entire teachings of Buddhism, which explains the cause of suffering and the means of deliverance therefrom. This was the first doctrine taught by the Buddha after his Enlightenment. They are: the truth of Suffering, of the Origin of suffering, of the Extinction of suffering, and of the eightfold Path leading to the extinction of suffering. Ariya sacca (pl)

Four Stages of Liberation (eng) These are the four stages of Enlightenment in the Theravada tradition, namely the stages of (1) stream-enterer, sotapanna (pl), srotapanna (skt) (2) once-returner, sakadagami (pl) (3) non-returner, anagami (pl), anagamin (skt) (4) the holy one, arahat (pl), arhat (skt).

Kamma (pl) Action performed by oneself that will have an effect on one's future. Correctly speaking denotes the wholesome or unwholesome volition and their concomitant mental factors, causing rebirth and shaping the destiny of beings. Karma (skt)

Kuan Yin (ch) The Bodhisatta of Compassion. Also known as the 'Goddess of Mercy' in China and 'she who hears the cries of the world'. Kuan Yin is one of the Three Pure Land Sages and is generally represented in the feminine form especially in East Asia. Avalokitesvara (pl/skt) Chenrezi (tib)

Loving-kindness (eng) Loving-kindness; selfless love and good will. One of the qualities of a pure mind. Metta (pl) Maitri (skt)

Mahayana (pl/skt) The Great Vehicle tradition. Mahayana is one of the main traditions of Buddhism, and expounds on the Bodhisatta practice as the means towards Enlightenment of both oneself and others.

Mantra (skt) Incantation. Literally, 'uniting and holding', i.e. uniting all Dhammas and holding all meanings. A mantra is a formula said to protect one who recites it and to benefit him by virtue of its mystic power. Mantras are recited in Sanskrit and sometimes have no literal mean-

ing. They are especially valued in esoteric Buddhism.

Metta (pl) See Loving-kindness (eng) Maitri (skt)

Middle Path (Noble Eightfold Path) (eng) The path leading to liberation from suffering. It is divided into three stages or trainings: (1) Sila, which includes right speech, right actions and right livelihood, (2) Samadhi, which includes right effort, right awareness and right concentration, (3) Panna, which includes right thought, right understanding. Ariya atthangika magga (pl)

Mudra (skt) Literally, 'seal, sign'. Ritual gestures of the hands used in symbolic magic, especially in the esoteric schools. They are used in conjunction with mantras as aids to meditation. Buddha images are found in a variety of mudra positions.

Nibbana (pl) Freedom from suffering; the highest and ultimate goal of all Buddhist aspirations, i.e. the absolute extinction of the life affirming will manifested as greed, hatred and delusion, and convulsively clinging to existence. Nirvana (skt)

Noble Eightfold Path (eng) The path leading to liberation from suffering. It is divided into three stages or trainings: (1) Sila, which includes right speech, right actions and right livelihood, (2) Samadhi, which includes right effort, right awareness and right concentration, (3) Panna, which includes right thought, right understanding. Ariya atthangika magga (pl)

Non-self (eng) Egolessness. Neither within the bodily and mental phenomena of existence, nor outside of them, can be found anything that in the ultimate sense could be regarded as a self-existing real Ego-entity, soul or any other abiding substance. Anatta (pl) Anatman (skt)

Pali (pl) The canonical language of Ceylonese Buddhists, believed to be very similar to the colloquial language spoken by Sakyamuni Buddha, in which the canonical texts of the Theravada are composed.

Panna (pl) Wisdom; insight. The third of the three trainings by which the Noble Eightfold Path is practised. There are three kinds of wisdom: received (heard) wisdom, intellectual wisdom and experiential wisdom. Prajna (skt)

Parami (pl) Perfections. The stages of spiritual perfection followed by the Bodhisatta in his progress to Buddhahood. In the Theravada ten qualities are given: (1) Perfection in Giving, (2) Morality, (3) Renunciation, (4) Wisdom, (5) Energy, (6) Patience or Forbearance, (7) Truthfulness, (8) Resolution, (9) Loving-kindness, (10) Equanimity. In the Mahayana scriptures, a partly differing list of six is given: (1) Liberality, (2) Morality, (3) Patience, (4) Energy, (5) Meditation, (6) Wisdom. Paramita (skt)

Parinibbana (pl) Translated as 'perfect quietude'. This term originally had the same meaning as Nibbana (Nirvana) and referred to the stage in which all illusion had been eliminated. It is commonly used to indicate the passing away of the physical body of a Buddha. Parinirvana (skt)

Paticca samuppada (pl) See Dependent Origination (eng) Pratitya samutpada (skt)

Relics (eng) The cremated remains of Enlightened Beings.

Sacca (pl) Literally, 'truth'.

Samadhi (pl/skt) Concentration; fixing of the mind on a single object; control over the mind. The second of the three trainings by which the Noble Eightfold Path is practised. When cultivated as an end in itself, it leads to the attainment of the states of mental absorption, but not to total liberation of the mind.

Samsara (pl/skt) Cycle of rebirth; conditioned world; world of suffering. Also more precisely refers to the unbroken chain of the fivefold aggregate-combinations, which constantly change from moment to moment continuously, one upon the other through inconceivable periods of time.

Sangha (pl/skt) Literally, 'congregation'. The monastic order founded by the Buddha, the members of which are called Bhikkhus (males) or Bhikkhunis (females). Sangha is the third of the Three Jewels (Triple Gem) of Buddhism, i.e. the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.

Sila (pl) Morality; abstaining from physical and vocal actions that cause harm to oneself and others. It is the foundation of the whole Buddhist practice and is the first of the three trainings by which the Noble Eightfold Path is practised. Buddhist morality does not consist in the mere not-committing of evil actions, but is in each instance the clearly conscious and intentional restraint from the bad actions in question and corresponds to the simultaneously arising volition. For a lay person, sila is practised in daily life by following the Five Precepts. Shila (skt)

Stupa (skt) A Buddhist monument, generally of a dome-shaped form, originally erected over sacred relics of the Buddha and at places consecrated as the scenes of his acts. In East Asia, the stupa developed into the tower-like pagoda, in which are enshrined various objects sacred to Buddhism.

Sutta (pl) Discourse of the Buddha or one of his leading disciples. In the early stages of Buddhist history, suttas were memorised, and only in later times were they written down. Sutra (skt)
ha-nature (eng)

Theravada (pl) Literally, 'teaching of the elders'. The teachings of the Buddha, in the form in which they have been preserved in the countries of south Asia (Burma, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia). Generally recognised as the oldest form of the teachings. Sometimes called Southern Buddhism or Pali Buddhism.

Tipitaka (pl) Literally, 'three baskets'. The three parts of the Tipitaka are the Vinaya Pitaka (Code of Ethics), Suttanta Pitaka (Discourses of the Buddha) and Abhidhamma Pitaka (Buddhist Philosophy). Tripitaka (skt)

Triple Gem (eng) The Three Jewels or Three Gems, which by all Buddhists are revered as the most venerable things, are the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Holy Sangha. Tiratana (pl)

Vajrayana (skt) Tibetan Buddhism. Also called Tantric Buddhism and Lamaism. Found principally in Tibet, also now Mongolia, India and parts of China. It is hierarchical and presided over by the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama.

Vinaya (pl/skt) The body of ethical rules and disciplines for Buddhist monks and laypersons prescribed by the Buddha.





Thousands of candles can be
lighted from a single candle,
and the life of the candle will
not be shortened.

Happiness never decreases by
being shared.

---Heart of the Buddha



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