

Wisdom Light Series

Are You Ready for Happiness?

Don't Let the Paper Tiger Scare You Off

KHENPO TSULTRIM LODRO

Translated by Lorraine Wu Chen

With Forewords by

Sogyal Rinpoche

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche



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Sogyal Rinpoche

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodrö is one of the most important Tibetan Buddhist masters alive today. As demonstrated by his many writings, he is not only exceptionally learned in the traditional Buddhist teachings, but is also deeply familiar with science, western philosophy and the modern world. Here in this short text, drawn from a series of lectures, he encourages us to remember the Buddha's fundamental message on the real meaning and purpose of life: the cultivation of genuine wisdom and compassion. I am a deep admirer of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodrö and supporter of his work.

Foreword

I would like to thank the directors not only for creating this opportunity to honour Khen Rinpoche, but also for giving me the chance to write a few introductory words for this auspicious occasion.

Actually I am not the right person to do this. First, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro Rinpoche needs no introduction. He speaks for himself by his example. Even if you need someone to give an introduction, it should not be done by someone shady like me who eats betel nut and is found wearing very colorful clothes, and hanging around with colorful people in colorful places.

Nevertheless, I have requested to do this, because I do have something I want to say. In this degenerate time, the glory of the Buddha is dim. The weight of the Dharma is not felt. I know that the Buddha said one should not depend on the person but on the truth. But the actual realization of the Dharma is extremely rare for most of us. The words of the Dharma are too vast and deep, and most of us are too lazy to pursue them, let alone to comprehend them. So even though we know we should not rely on a person, we human beings have the habit of looking up to something tangible in human form as a role model.

So teachers, masters, and spiritual leaders are very important. And we have no shortage of such teachers, masters, and lamas today. In fact we have far more of them than used T-shirts. This is an age when even teenagers have the name His Holiness. But genuine upholders of the Dharma are as rare as stars in the daylight, and the few that we have are hardly shining.

As the Buddha said, only an enlightened being can judge whether another person is enlightened or not. So I cannot really say who is a perfect being and who is not. But at least, even in this age, we do still have interest in Dharma practice, and so naturally the expounder of the Dharma becomes important.

Even though, as I said, my lifestyle is colorful and I cannot make judgements on others, there is probably one good thing about which I can boast — that at least I do know that I should worry about the survival of the Dharma. And there is good reason to be concerned, good reason to be worried. In fact we should be panicked.

That I have this deep concern, of course, is solely the blessing of my own masters, who themselves spent so much time and energy worrying about the survival of the Dharma. Through their blessing and guidance, I have learned not to just worry about the Dharma in my own backyard — Tibetan Buddhism — but I have learned to worry about Shingon Buddhism in Japan, Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and more. My worry may not be constant, but at least at times, I do worry.

I also worry that there are not many who worry. Even the aging lamas with gray hair and wrinkled skin don't seem to worry. Well, they may worry somewhat, but generally only in relation to their own temples, or at best, to their own lineage.

So this is why I want to express that it gives me so much hope just knowing that Khen Rinpoche exists on this earth, because his actions have spoken louder than his words. And please make a really big note about this because, even though I have no pure perception, and am very critical and arrogant, I

want to say that I have been observing Khen Rinpoche closely.

I have not received any teaching from Khen Rinpoche. I did try to listen to some recordings, though I gave up because his dialect is too strong for me, and I have flipped through some of his books. But these are not the real reasons for my respect. I feel that Khen Rinpoche is not just a teacher, but he is actually a model. As we know, every teacher needs a teacher for himself. And Khen Rinpoche was groomed for many years by one of the greatest beings, Jigme Phunstok Rinpoche, and he manifests that extraordinary tutelage today in his work and in his life.

As many of you know, Khen Rinpoche is also the administrative Khenpo of one of the most important seats, Serthar Larung. And here my impression of Serthar Larung has nothing to do with there being so many monks and nuns. Rather, I have observed what they do and what they have achieved. I have also observed how they spend their money and where they spend their money. And I have observed whether this institute is only producing empty-headed scholars or whether it has genuinely practising practitioners. In all these dimensions, Serthar Larung excels.

I also want to note that the Khenpo in front of us is not the son of some rich, high, prestigious family. He is not the cousin or brother of some very important lama, and he doesn't have HH in front of his name. Who he is and what he has accomplished is through his own merit and genuine dedication and practice, and this is inspiring for so many practitioners.

I especially want to single out how precious it is for the Chinese-speaking world, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, that Khen Rinpoche speaks your language. Even

though Buddhism is growing in the West, in my lifetime I don't see the Buddhadharma being adopted and practised by a sizeable percentage of Americans and Europeans. And we know that the Buddhadharma is far from flourishing in the very birthplace of Buddhism, in India. By contrast, Buddhism has contributed so much to Chinese civilization in the past and has a major resurgent role to play in Chinese society today. So for the Chinese-speaking world, it is such a priceless opportunity for you to have a direct link with Rinpoche.

For all these reasons and more, I want to request Rinpoche to take care of himself and to live long and to eat less butter.

Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

This is the transcription of Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche's introductory speech at the public talk given by Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro in Taipei, Taiwan on January 22, 2015.

A Note About the Author

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodrö was born in 1962 in Drango (Luhuo) County in Sichuan Province's Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. In 1984, he received monastic ordination at the world-renowned Larung Five Sciences Buddhist Institute (Larung Gar) in Serthar, becoming a disciple of the preeminent spiritual master, H.H. Chogyel Yeshe Norbu Jigme Phunstok. After many years dedicated to the study of the five main sutric treatises and tantric scripture, he was awarded the title of Khenpo in recognition of his scholarship.

For more than twenty years, Khenpo has overseen monastic education at Larung Gar, producing successive generations of accomplished students. During the 1990s, he gave a series of dharma teachings in Singapore, Malaysia, and Taiwan. Over the past decade, Khenpo has concentrated efforts in Tibetan areas, promoting environmental awareness, education, vegetarianism, and the importance of protecting living beings and abstaining from taking life. At the same time, he has sought to deepen the broader Tibetan community's understanding of basic dharma, and to this end has traveled widely giving teachings to lay audiences. Placing great importance on the promotion of Tibetan culture, Khenpo has founded libraries and schools. Notably, he has also coordinated a team of language specialists and scholars representing all Tibetan regions to collaborate on the compilation of a tri-lingual (Tibetan-Chinese-English) dictionary of new vocabulary terms.

Two volumes have been published in the past five years:

Chinese-Tibetan-English Illustrated Dictionary of New Daily Vocabulary

Chinese-Tibetan-English Dictionary of New Daily Vocabulary

Over the last ten years, Khenpo has been committed to deepening his understanding of western science and philosophy, and is utilizing contemporary methods to disseminate Buddhist culture. Khenpo has published extensively on Buddhism in Tibetan, Chinese and English languages. His Tibetan publications include *four volumes of collected writings*; his Chinese monographs include the *Wisdom Light Series*, *Stories of Transmigration*, *Buddhism: Superstition or Wisdom?*, *The Heart Sutra and Quantum Physics*, *The Secret Code for Unlocking Tibetan Buddhism*, *Tibetan Buddhism: Lifting the Veil of Mystery and Comprehending the Book Called Life*; translated English publications include *Daily Inspiration from Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro*, *The Right View* and *Are You Ready for Happiness?*

Translator's Note

I first came upon the teachings of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro Rinpoche early in 2014. I remember being surprised by the number of people who informed me of his visit to Taiwan and told me to catch his lectures. As a student of Tibetan Buddhism for more than twenty years, I am accustomed to hearing the teachings in Tibetan or English which is then translated into Chinese. I did not expect a Tibetan Buddhist master to speak to us directly in Chinese. Undoubtedly, this made a difference in terms of the clarity and completeness of the lectures in the time allowed. Most of all, however, I was impressed by the strong sense of purpose and urgency in which he communicated the timeless wisdom of the Dharma. When I was approached in regard to translating one of his books, I was quick to accept the challenge.

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro Rinpoche personifies the spirit of bodhicitta which is essential to all practitioners on the Mahayana Buddhist path. While he encourages followers to engage in spiritual practice and to look inward to discover their basic wisdom and compassion, his teachings are very practical and call for a balance in spiritual life and everyday life. This book is a compilation of many lectures. It examines the fundamental nature of happiness and suffering and how we can transform both into the path. We need the Dharma to help us through difficult times, but it is just as important for us to apply the teachings in good times. The key concepts and methods in Buddhism are introduced in the text; some themes are repeated in multiple places; all are directed at helping us find genuine happiness and meaning in life.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to translate this book. I hope the translation is faithful to the spirit and meaning of the teachings and is easy to read. A special thanks to Angela Liu for her valuable comments and substantial in this effort. It is my sincere hope anyone interested in the spiritual path can derive benefit from reading this English edition.

Lorraine Wu Chen

Taipei, Taiwan

March 2015



The Tibetan Buddhist View on Happiness



Buddhism, certainly Tibetan Buddhism, places great importance on happiness. However, the emphasis in Mahayana Buddhism is not on one's own happiness; it is the welfare of all sentient beings which is important. When we strive to bring joy to all beings, we can be sure of attaining even greater happiness for ourselves. This well — being ultimately surpasses any that material enjoyment can bring. Such is the Tibetan Buddhist view on happiness.





Since ancient times, the one thing human beings have always longed for is happiness. Yet, with all the progress in society, what we believe to be happiness has eluded us. The rapid decline in the index on global well-being has compelled all of us to rethink: What is happiness? How do we find it? In recent years, this topic has generated even greater interest.

Perhaps there are some methods in Buddhism. These methods might not work for everyone since we each have individual needs — in Buddhist terms, this is to say no one method can suit everyone since we each have karmic dispositions that are vastly different. However, for those who have the inclination, the methods can guide us in finding happiness in everyday life and at work, and in leading a fuller and more meaningful life.

Buddhism, certainly Tibetan Buddhism, places great importance on happiness. The emphasis in Mahayana Buddhism is not on one's own happiness but rather that of all sentient beings. When we strive for the welfare of all beings, we can at the same time attain even greater happiness for ourselves. This well-being ultimately surpasses any that material enjoyment can bring. Such is the Tibetan Buddhist view on happiness.

❁ THE NATURE OF HAPPINESS

In whatever work or research we engage in, we must begin by understanding its basic nature. Thus, let us first establish — what is happiness? What is the nature of happiness?

A Chinese book titled *What is Happiness* addresses this



question from the viewpoint of 155 experts from around the world. For instance, happiness is having a stable income; happiness is harmony in the family; happiness is travelling around the world; happiness is just a glass of water, etc. There is no consensus.

Buddhism believes the nature of happiness is neither a steady income nor harmony in the family, neither the joy of seeing the world nor a glass of water. Although all may bring a sense of well-being, they are not the nature of happiness.

The true nature of happiness is a special feeling from within. Sometimes this feeling is related to material matter; other times there is no connection at all. Material matter is only one cause or condition which creates a feeling of well-being. It can bring about a temporary sense of security or satisfaction, from which one can in turn derive temporary happiness. The different forms of happiness, such as a steady income, are sources of happiness but are not happiness itself.

If happiness is a feeling, what is the basis of this feeling? A feeling of happiness comes from satisfaction; a feeling of satisfaction comes mostly from a new and fresh sensation. These types of feeling are all related to our mind and have no direct connection with the material world.

❁ SOURCE OF HAPPINESS

We can break down happiness into endless types. To simplify, however, there are essentially two kinds: one is happiness derived from worldly things; the other is happiness which does



not come from worldly things. Within the second kind, one type is a feeling of great happiness over and above general well-being. This feeling is experienced during the course of serving or benefiting other sentient beings — a pursuit also shared by the bodhisattvas in Mahayana Buddhism.

Some people believe Buddhism opposes all forms of material enjoyment, enforces complete control over desire, and promotes ascetic practice. Actually, this is a misunderstanding. The Buddha said followers have the right to enjoy, not reject, what they are entitled to — wealth which is properly acquired or blessings accumulated during a past life from virtuous activity. The Buddha did not deny, to a certain extent, material goods can bring happiness. However, he made it clear not all happiness comes from material goods. He also said the happiness derived from material things is very short-lived and unreliable.

Many psychologists understand, to varying degree, the workings of the mind; philosophers also examine happiness from a different perspective. Nevertheless, I think, among all the religions and academic disciplines, it is Buddhism that has the most complete view on this subject. The study of the mind in Buddhism is extremely sophisticated. How the mind functions is very clearly elucidated by the Buddha in the sutras.

In Buddhism, we are known as ordinary people if we have never received any training of the mind. From the standpoint of the mind, it does not matter how wealthy, socially prominent, or knowledgeable we are; without mind practice, we are still ordinary people. This term is not meant to be disparaging; it simply denotes a person who lacks spiritual training.

For ordinary people, the mind follows a natural pattern. This



pattern always takes the same direction. To start with, material things can bring us a feeling of happiness. This feeling of happiness is based on a sense of satisfaction; in turn this sense of satisfaction comes from having a new or fresh experience. When we examine the feeling of happiness, we see that all things lose their luster once the novelty wears off. Being new and fresh is not a quality that can last forever; it is only a matter of time before it dissipates. When the new sensation disappears, the feeling of satisfaction loses its base and disappears with it. The feeling of happiness then disappears as well.

As human beings, we think material things are what we spend a lifetime pursuing; actually, we are only chasing after a feeling. The Buddha pointed to this important distinction, but we have yet to recognize or discover it.

The Buddha said: we can seek happiness — that is our right; however, the happiness derived from material things cannot be relied on. Thus, when we pursue worldly pleasures, we should concurrently look for even greater happiness — the kind that comes from the spirit, or from undertaking work which is noble and meaningful.

IN SEARCH OF THE METHODS TO HAPPINESS

Darrin M. McMahon, an American professor, spent six years researching the history and livelihood of mankind, and completed a book titled *Happiness: A History*. He concludes at the end of the book that happiness may only exist in our imagination: we can pursue happiness, but it only lives in our imagination; we can think of happiness as an ideal to follow, but



it may never be attained.

I think this conclusion is overly pessimistic because it is based on incorrect methods. If our methods are correct, we can find happiness in this life. The question is how we look for them. If the methods are incorrect, we may not be able to attain happiness however hard we try.

What then are the right methods?

There are essentially five methods to happiness, the three “No’s” and two “Should’s.”

The Three “No’s” :

First, do not compare. The more we like to compare with others, the less likely we are to find happiness. Take as an example a person who owns a high-performance luxury car; if he likes to compare, he is sure to find someone in his circle of friends who has a better car. As in the saying “there is always a better man, a higher mountain,” even if the person excels in everything now, there is no guarantee he won’t be surpassed in a year or two. If he chooses to compete again at that time, he will find himself in a very tiresome chase. To compare is not necessary in life, but it is often the cause of great suffering.

Second, do not be vain. The more we indulge in vanity, the more likely we are to feel empty and worthless. At the end of the vicious cycle, we can only fill our emptiness with more vanity. This feeling is one of immeasurable suffering. A lot of very wealthy people find that they would rather die than live because they feel empty inside; their wealth cannot be counted on in any way to bring happiness.

Many people think wealth is the answer to happiness.

However, after acquiring wealth, they often do not experience the happiness they imagine. In the period from the 1950’s up to the year 2000, income in the West increased threefold, but people’s well-being actually declined. A lot of psychologists, sociologists, and economists have studied this phenomenon over a half century and have concluded: when our annual income is around forty thousand US dollars, money brings a sense of security, which in turn leads to sense of well-being; when annual income exceeds this amount, there is no longer a connection between money and happiness. Thus, having more wealth is no guarantee of happiness.

For example, there is a psychological condition called compulsive buying disorder. When people become depressed, they develop an obsession with buying to make up for the emptiness they feel. In the end, however, they no longer derive the same satisfaction that came with earlier purchases, and their suffering resumes.

Consequently, a lot of values accumulated over time have come under question. People have started to rethink what happiness is and how a new kind of happiness can be attained.

Third, do not be too greedy. Most people have a misunderstanding about Buddhism and assume that Buddhism refutes all forms of desire and physical pleasures. This is not the case. The Buddha also acknowledged that, to a certain extent, desire is a driving force. For instance, the fervent wish to study the Buddhist teachings, to become Buddha, and to benefit sentient beings all constitute desire. Without this desire, one would lose the impetus to study the teachings. Thus, on the whole, the Buddha did not oppose desire. The Buddha said:



ordinary people cannot do or survive without desire; they drink when they are thirsty and eat when they are hungry. However, when desire becomes excessive, it leads to consequences we do not wish to see — suffering, disappointment, hopelessness, etc.

We can ask ourselves: How do I find happiness? What is it that I would have to lose to be unhappy? If we contemplate in this way, we will find the answer — desire, if left unchecked, is boundless. Excessive desire ultimately drowns us and leads to a state of great suffering.

The happiness that material enjoyment brings is limited. Yet what we want is unlimited. How is it possible to fill an infinite space with something which has a limit? Certainly not in this lifetime! Our lifespan is no more than several decades, but even if we lived billions of years, we would still fall short of satisfying ever-growing greed. In fact, the longer we live, the greater our desire and the suffering that follows. Thus, the Buddha admonished us to keep our desire in check in order to gain true happiness; if we are always chasing after material things, we will never find real happiness.

To cut off desire completely, we have to rely on Buddhist practice. When we attain Buddhahood, there is no more desire. The Buddha's compassion and infinite wisdom has already replaced all worldly desires. But before attaining Buddhahood, ordinary people still crave for things. In our practice, we must be sure to avoid the two extreme paths. One extreme is to cut off all material desires. A number of ancient religions in India place great emphasis on ascetic practice — denial of food for a long period of time, no clothing or speech, even cruel punishment to one's body. The Buddha did not approve of these



practices and in fact considered the methods, to a certain extent, to be harmful to one's well-being. The other extreme is to give in to all our desires. We spend a lifetime working hard to fill our needs, but are still dissatisfied when it is time to leave the world. In the end, it is only resentment and anger that we bring with us. That would hardly be worth it.

The Two "Should's" :

Fourth, establish the right view on life. Do not idealize life, or see it as perfect. If we are not alert to impending crises, we will be greatly disappointed when confronted with birth, aging, sickness, and death and various kinds of suffering. We may take extreme steps if we cannot handle the suffering. Hence, the right amount of precaution is necessary to surmount life's difficulties. When accidents happen, we should always remind ourselves: birth, aging, sickness, and death; sadness, joy, parting, and reunion are all part of life. None of us are spared or can escape, so we must not be overly weak. In life, there are many complications and misfortunes which cannot be avoided; some happen for objective reasons, some are caused by our past karma. Whatever the reason, we cannot run away from them. As long as we have a body, we will experience birth, aging, sickness, and death. If we are not strong enough to deal with this, we will incur a great deal of suffering.

Buddha Sakyamuni handed down many methods to face birth, aging, sickness, and death, and always taught us to confront, not run away from our suffering

Fifth, cultivate the mind. The best way to regulate or cultivate our mind is to practice meditation. In Chinese Buddhism, among the several schools that are most influential,



including Pure Land and Ch'an, Ch'an Buddhism places great emphasis on meditative practice; in Tibetan Buddhism, there is also a rich diversity of methods in meditation. These practices are intended for liberation and Buddhahood; even if we do not aspire to this ultimate goal, they can help cultivate the mind.

Meditative absorption or concentration can be practiced with or without religious belief, just as yoga may or may not be associated with any religion. Yoga is simply a practice that leads to good health. Likewise, meditation can, by regulating our mentality, bring happiness and cure depression.

The Buddha gave us many methods for cultivating the mind. Whether we believe in the Buddha or not, the mind practices are important to all of us. They can also be practiced by anyone.

Undoubtedly, the result of the practice will be different for people with religious belief and those without. However, this is not a problem. We can achieve our goals with these mind practices — whether we want to attain Buddhahood and benefit all sentient beings, realize self-liberation, or simply alleviate stress, improve the quality of our life, and live a happier and more meaningful life.

What is unfortunate, however, is that everyone seems to be placing emphasis on training the body, not the mind. This preoccupation is leading to an imminent crisis around the world — not a financial crisis, but a crisis of the mind. Depression, accompanied by symptoms of anxiety and loneliness, has already become the third biggest killer of mankind, following cancer and AIDS, respectively.

There are two ways to treat depression: one is by way of



meditation, which not only treats both symptom and illness, but also brings unexpected benefits; the other is by way of medication, which in theory relies on the physiological effects of drugs to control anxiety. Although patients may appear to be free of depression, the drugs have side effects which impair their cognitive ability and thus cannot be used over a long period of time.

If a person is in the initial stage of depression, drugs are unnecessary; by regulating the mind, symptoms such as amnesia, anxiety, and other negative emotions can be treated. When these are alleviated, the person will be able to regain his or her focus and experience greater efficiency at work. If a person's condition is already quite serious, drugs can be used first to contain the symptoms. This is because a new practitioner lacks the ability to stabilize the condition. Once the situation has improved, he or she should follow up with meditation to get to the source of the problem.

Whether we discuss meditation from the standpoint of Buddhism or science, the power of meditative concentration is inconceivable.

American scientists once conducted an experiment in which the participants were Tibetan Buddhist practitioners of meditative concentration. The researchers utilized, on one side, brainwave patterns to measure changes in brainwaves, and on the other, magnetic resonance imaging to locate brain activity. In the end, they concluded meditation can not only change brain activity in the short term, it can, with great likelihood, change brain activity permanently. In other words, with meditation, one can completely eliminate anxiety, sadness, and other negative



feelings, create a sense of happiness, even restructure the brain.

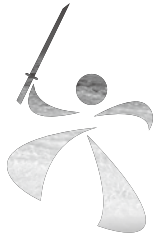
Thus, whether we are corporate executives or workers under great pressure, if we can meditate every evening for twenty minutes or half an hour, and let go of the negative emotions accumulated over the course of a day, we will be able to maintain a happier state of mind going into our sleep. In so doing, we effectively regulate both body and mind. According to psychologists, five minutes of deep meditation is equivalent to an hour of sleep. Hence, the practice of meditation every evening helps not only to regulate both body and mind, but also to maintain a high energy level.

It is not necessary to forgo family, life, or work to practice meditation. While enjoying material wealth and family life in this world, we can make time for practice on a regular basis. If we can stay calm and relaxed in the midst of life's activities, we will be able to experience happiness that comes from the deep recesses of our mind.





The Significance of Buddhist Philosophy Today



In our world today, it is increasingly apparent and obvious a lot of problems of a spiritual nature cannot be resolved by material means. To treat mental problems we must work with the mind. It is imperative that we look immediately for answers within the Buddhist culture to address concrete problems in our life, and to ameliorate the stress and anxiety we feel.





Buddhism can be said to be a special kind of culture since it encompasses many rich academic disciplines, among them philosophy, astronomy, geography, and science. Not only that, Buddhism also has its own view on life, on right values, and on the world. In this chapter, we will introduce the Buddhist view on the world.

The worldview is firstly a specific knowledge; but more importantly, it is one of formulating this knowledge into ways and methods which can be used in our daily life. One aspect deals with regulating our own mind; the other aspect deals with benefiting sentient beings, bringing happiness, a healthy life, and joy to more people — this is also the basic tenet of Buddhism.

Some students of Buddhism or other religions like to dwell on clairvoyant power and states of realization, but this is not the real purpose of Buddhism. Although Buddhism does not object to transcendent power, it does not chase after it. Buddhism mainly teaches how to cultivate compassion, develop wisdom, and serve others.

In this modern age, nearly everyone is under a great deal of pressure, in particular many entrepreneurs. It has become increasingly apparent and obvious there are a lot of problems of a spiritual nature which cannot be resolved by material means. Many rich people have discovered wealth is not the answer to everything. In the past, it was assumed wealth would lead to happiness; contrary to expectation, it has actually had a substantial negative impact.

The World Bank and World Health Organization expect depression to be the biggest public health problem worldwide in the not too distant future. In 2006 alone, the annual expenditure



on anti-depressants in the United States was estimated at seventy-six billion US dollars. However, the effectiveness of these drugs has been less than ideal, since the drugs cause damage to that part of the brain that controls the subtle thought processes. Thus, the long term use of anti-depressants will affect our emotional state.

How can we solve this problem?

To treat mental problems we must work with the mind. Nothing could be more appropriate for the treatment of mental conditions than methods that work with the mind. Especially in our present business-oriented society, it is imperative that we look immediately for methods and answers within the Buddhist culture to address concrete problems in our life, and ameliorate the stress and anxiety we feel.

Of course, if we are always lingering on the outside, analyzing and judging Buddhism from the standpoint of a bystander, the result cannot be good. However, if we are willing to joyously approach, even readily seek, the teachings of the Buddha, I am certain answers can be found to our satisfaction.

In the following, I shall try to give a simple introduction to the basic Buddhist doctrines and to several meditative practices for eliminating stress.



✦ OVERVIEW OF BUDDHISM

Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma

Buddha Sakyamuni turned the wheel of Dharma three times.

The first turning of the wheel of Dharma came shortly after the Buddha attained Buddhahood. The teachings are basic in nature, easy to understand, and deal mainly with cultivating proper conduct in life, eradicating evil deeds, taking up virtuous deeds, and other such actions linked to Theravada Buddhism. The teachings of the first turning are likened to courses given in primary school.

The Buddha then turned the wheel of Dharma a second time at Vulture's Peak in India, with the emphasis this time on prajna. "Prajna" is a Sanskrit word, also called prajnaparamita, which in Chinese is translated as zhi hui du. "Zhi hui" means (transcendent) wisdom; "du" means crossing over to the other shore.

Every sentient being is endowed with wisdom, but our wisdom is limited in depth and scope because we lack proper training of the mind. Zhi hui du refers specifically to the training of the mind, to cultivating the wisdom that allows us to reach the unsurpassed state of attainment — Buddhahood. From the view of an outsider, the process appears to be mysterious and connected in some way with religion; however, a true practitioner knows this training of the mind is very real. The sutras most people are familiar with, such as the *Heart Sutra* and *Diamond Sutra*, as well as many Ch'an discourses, belong to the second turning of the wheel of Dharma. The

teachings of the second turning are likened to courses given in secondary school.

The third turning of the wheel of Dharma focuses on the grand vision of Mahayana Buddhism and on the clarity aspect of Buddha nature. The teachings are more advanced by comparison. Just prior to his parinirvana, Buddha Sakyamuni also transmitted tantric practices. The core teachings of the third turning of the wheel of Dharma in exoteric Mahayana Buddhism and the tantric practices are likened to courses given in the university.

After Buddha Sakyamuni entered parinirvana, his disciples proceeded to explain, in accordance with their own understanding and realization, the teachings which the Buddha expounded. The Dharma teachings which are the actual words of the Buddha are called sutras; the commentaries of the disciples are called sastras. In the Chinese edition of the *Tripitaka*, collections of both the sutras and the sastras can be found.

There is an extensive compilation of sutras and sastras in Buddhist literature. Many of the Tibetan monasteries and Buddhist institutes of advanced studies have included five types of sastras in their required curriculum. They are called the five major categories of sastras.

Five Major Categories of Sastras

The five major categories of sastras are five different types of commentaries, each of which is a system of its own.



The first type of sastra is called precepts, which deals primarily with regulations governing the conduct of monastics and laymen.

The second type of sastra is called Abhidharma which focuses on many subjects: among the subjects are creation, destruction and change within the universe, the condition of the microcosm, human physiology, mental phenomena, karmic cause and effect, reincarnation, meditative practice, and the nature and type of liberation.

In the area of mental phenomena, Buddhism provides a very detailed analysis of the human mind. Included are classifications of emotional states, the number of which are negative or positive, the relationship between different types of emotions, the circumstances under which the emotions arise or disappear, how they can be controlled, etc. Also included are the meditation practices of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.

The third type of sastra is called the Middle Way. Simply speaking, it refers to the view in the middle, in neither extreme. The core concept in the Middle Way is emptiness; the extreme views are existence and non-existence, eternalism and nihilism, etc. The Middle Way is one of Mahayana Buddhism's most important sastras.

The fourth type of sastra is called logic, which is a very special and sophisticated form of dialectics. Its approach is similar to the major and minor premises in Western philosophy, but Buddhist logic covers a lot more fronts. A very comprehensive and rigorous logic, it should be studied by those with interest in this subject.

Logic is the same as reasoning. It is the study of reaching



conclusions based on a series of logical steps.

In many Tibetan monasteries, it is common to see monastics engaged in debate. It is through debate that views are established.

The fifth type of sastra is called *Ornament of Clear Realization*, which deals primarily with the Mahayana Buddhist practice. What do we mean by practice? Although many people are very learned in literature and the arts, what constitutes cultural refinement is just knowledge. The problem is whether we can integrate this knowledge into our life. For example, a person can be proficient in Confucian philosophy and very well versed in the *Analects* and *Di Zi Gui (Standards for Students)*; whether this knowledge can be applied to his or her life, however, requires special practice. In this sastra, the entire process of the *Mahayana* Buddhist practice is clearly laid out.

The following is a simple introduction to the worldview in *Mahayana Abhidharma* and to some of the concepts in the Middle Way.

✿ REALISTS, IDEALISTS, ILLUSIONISTS

Western philosophy can be divided into two different schools of thought — idealists and realists. Buddhism is neither one nor the other, even though the teachings contain a great deal of both elements. Some of the more substantive views of the idealist school in the West are set forth, for instance, in Bertrand Russell's discourse "Appearance and Reality," and in the



writings of George Berkeley, the prominent British empirical idealist. They claimed reality consists solely of sensory perceptions and that there is no material world apart from this reality. These concepts are similar to the Mind Only school in Buddhism. However, Berkeley in the end encountered a contradiction in his own argument. In his response to exponents of the realist school, he grudgingly handed the problem back to God, which rendered his position unacceptable.

The Mind Only tradition is relatively more important in Chinese Buddhism. When Xuanzang went to India to seek the Dharma, he spent most of his time studying at Nalanda University, the highest Buddhist institute of learning in India at the time. Courses were offered in Mind Only, Middle Way, and tantra. Xuanzang's teacher was an accomplished master of the Mind Only school. As a result, Xuanzang received more of his training in the Mind Only tradition, and mainly propagated this school of thought upon returning to China.

Although some of the views of the Mind Only school are similar to the idealists, the underlying concepts in Buddhism and the idealist school are not the same. If I must select a comparable name for Buddhism, it is "illusionist."

✿ UNDERSTANDING ILLUSION

Firstly, Buddhism teaches two types of truth — relative truth and ultimate truth. The word "truth" is used in both cases to indicate they are both real.

What is real? As an example, all the appearances in a dream



are not real to a person who is awake; however, they are very real to a person in the midst of a dream, just as the experiences in life are very real to a person during the day. Similarly, a practitioner and a non-practitioner see this world differently. However, each thinks the world he or she lives in is real.

According to the Buddha, the life that ordinary people live is real to them. Hence, ordinary people can only do what is right; they must not do what is wrong such as stealing, cheating, lying, taking life, etc. However, this reality is just relative reality, not absolute reality.

As an example, if we put a cobblestone on a table and examine it with our eyes, we only see a still object. From the standpoint of our eyes, there is motion in water and the clouds; there is no motion in a physical structure and a cobblestone. However, placed under a microscope, the situation is completely different. This apparent contradiction arises because the eye and microscope perceive things from a different level. The microscope is a sophisticated instrument which can see more clearly than the eye; accordingly we should conclude the finding under the microscope is more accurate. Nonetheless, in everyday life, we consider the stillness of objects we perceive with the eye to be true. In this relative reality, that which is perceived with the eye is relative truth; that which is perceived through the microscope is ultimate truth.

We should never rely too much on our senses because they are imperfect. The eye can only see the most superficial layer of the earth; we see light, but only a minute part of the spectrum. We hear sounds, but only ordinary sounds; we cannot distinguish between sound waves of higher or



lower frequencies. Hence, we cannot conclude our sensory perceptions are absolutely real.

What about the discovery of Brownian motion under the microscope — is it real at the absolute level? Actually, there is always some wisdom more profound, an instrument more advanced and more sensitive. With the emergence of quantum mechanics, we find many of the theories in classical physics no longer work. All worldly knowledge is only valid on a relative level, not on an absolute level.

Many people have read the *Heart Sutra* and may even have recited it. According to the *Heart Sutra*, there is no eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. Although in life no one would deny the existence of the eye, ear, etc., the ultimate conclusion in Buddhism is that all phenomena are illusory. We just have not realized it yet.

If we examine the world, we find the earth is travelling at a speed of 29.79 kilometers a second; yet in our lifetime, we are not in the least bit aware of it. What the sutras stated over two thousand years ago about the microcosm and what science has newly discovered are in agreement — all phenomena arise and cease in an instant. Whatever is newly born is instantly annihilated.

If this is the case, why do we not see the process of arising and ceasing? The reason is because it is happening so quickly we are not aware of it. Students of philosophy should find the concepts of motion and arising-ceasing easy to accept.

The term used in the sutras is “arising-ceasing” ; the term used in physics is “motion.” Which of these terms is



more precise? I personally think the Buddhist term “arising-ceasing” is more precise.

In observing the movement of electrons from the standpoint of physics, we mistakenly believe that if an electron starts out in the east, moves south, west, north in that order, and then back to its starting point, it is the same electron; hence we call this “motion.” However, in observing the movement of electrons from the standpoint of Buddhism, we discover that when an electron appears to be revolving around the nucleus of an atom, the electron occupying the first degree of the orbit is already destroyed in its place; occupying the second degree up to three hundred sixty degrees of the orbit are countless electrons, all newly arisen and instantly destroyed in their place; these different electrons form the illusion of an orbit.

In the same way, the world we see actually exists only in an infinitesimal fraction of a second (one out of ten thousand parts of a second, possibly less). The world in the instant before has already disappeared; the world in the future has yet to come. Nonetheless, we believe the world exists in a continuum, permanently without change. This conclusion is the result of our deluded mind.

There is a very convenient example in modern technology. The old motion picture film is actually made up of many reversal films; the first picture film has no connection whatsoever with the second picture film, but due to the speed at which they are rolled out (twenty-four films per second), we do not notice where one picture ends and the next begins. We mistakenly think when a person in an image is walking and talking, it is one continuous motion; we do not expect the



connecting images to be formed by many separate films. An illusion is produced because our eye cannot perceive matter of a subtle nature. For scientists and philosophers, this logic should be easy to follow.

Thus, Buddhism believes all phenomena which arise and cease due to causes and conditions are like a dream, like magic, like a water bubble, like shadow. They are all unreal and illusory.

However, from the standpoint of relative truth, if we want to survive and live a normal life, we need the illusion. If this illusion is shattered, the basis of our survival and our beliefs will collapse.

How do we prove the world is an illusion? A hundred years ago, our ancestors relied entirely on logic to make deductions and come to a conclusion. Today, apart from logic, we can also rely on technology to substantiate the conclusion that all phenomena are ultimately empty.

Perhaps one might ask how matter can be ultimately empty when the more it is divided, the more matter is produced.

In philosophy and mathematics, we refer to things sometimes as infinitely large or infinitely small. However, this is an incorrect concept, since an infinitely small particle simply doesn't exist in this world. For instance, a minute can be divided into sixty seconds; a second can be divided into one hundred even smaller units; if we continue in this way, we end up with something we call infinitely small.

In fact, if a second can be divided indefinitely, time will stop permanently on that second, unable to get past it. Yet we all



know, in the objective world, there is a time limit to a second. The two obviously contradict each other.

Similarly, if a molecule or electron can be divided indefinitely, then a building and a grain of rice will be equal in weight and mass. However, we know from experience a grain of rice hardly carries any weight or mass because it is comprised of very few molecules and atoms; a building, on the other hand, is massive and heavy because it is made up of a lot of molecules and atoms.

Why is there a contradiction? This is because there is a gap between our subjective consciousness and objective reality.

In other words, even though in concept a second can be divided into ten thousand units, or a hundred thousand units, etc., all of it is illusory. Just like a high-speed electric fan, we do not see the individual blades, only the circular form as a whole. Or a glass we drink from, we do not see the multitude of molecules and atoms which comprise it, or the many electrons which revolve around the nucleus of each atom. Our eye perception is very limited; we cannot see the true reality of phenomena, only the illusion.

*** APPLYING ILLUSIONIST CONCEPT TO LIFE**

Transcending the Mundane World

What does the concept of illusion have to do with our life in this world? How do we make use of it?



Firstly, even though we now know the world is an illusion, it is a very real world from the standpoint of our eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. Because of this relative reality, we have to be responsible to our society, family, and company employees; we need to build a career and provide for our family. We have to abstain from destroying and harming life, from stealing and cheating, etc. Knowing everything to be illusory, we must nonetheless distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil.

The Buddha exhorted us to live by the rules in this world, to discern between good and evil, and to be mindful of cause and effect.

Secondly, since we know everything is illusory, we are all in the midst of a dream. The difference is our dreams at night are generally short, whereas our dream in this world of samsara is comparatively long. When we reach the end of our lives and look back, we will find all the circumstances in life are as illusory and unreal as the dream we had the previous night. Hence, we should not grow overly attached to wealth, to relationships, etc. — things we think we can be attached to.

Of course, lay people do not have to abstain from desire. The Buddha did not believe it is wrong to have a normal relationship, so long as it does not bring harm to oneself. However, we should understand relationships are also illusory like a dream; we should not just plunge ourselves unduly into a relationship — without proper judgment, we only end up in misery.

A lot of lay people feel unbearable pain when they encounter problems in personal relationships mainly because of their over attachment.



The Buddha instructed us to follow the middle way, to avoid extreme measures in any situation. We need not be resentful, disgusted, or pessimistic in life; but we should not see life as perfect either. Wealth and relationships are neither good nor bad on their own; whether they become good or bad depend on the mind. If we look upon wealth, relationships, and other worldly pursuits with equanimity, our life will be that much happier.

The key to building happiness in life is our practice. Just as with an athlete who must train very hard in order to win the championship, or with a patient who must follow the doctor's prescription in order to recover. If we practice according to the Buddha's teachings, we can learn to deal with emotional negativities by not becoming despondent from excessive attachment nor desperate from overwhelming stress. In so doing, we can succeed in our work or business, and be very happy and carefree at the same time. In Buddhism, and in particular Ch'an, the expression "let go" is often used to describe this state of mind.

To let go does not mean to abandon. Letting go of our work is not the same as abandoning our work; letting go of wealth is not the same as rejecting wealth. To abandon is a form of escape; to let go is a method for confronting problems.

The world is not as beautiful as we think; life is filled with disappointments. If we expect too much from this world and from life, if we are not prepared for impending difficulties, we will just be left to face death, illness, bankruptcy, loss of reputation, etc. with apprehension. It will be hard for us to accept what happens at that time; even a minor problem can lead us to take our own lives.



During the Vietnam War, an admiral in the US navy, James Stockdale, was captured. His observations in prison led him to conclude: “The optimists were the first to die. They were the ones who blindly believed everything would work out. They always said, ‘We will be freed by Christmas!’ When it was Christmas and they were not freed yet, they would say, ‘We will definitely be out of here by Easter.’ When it was Easter and they were still in prison, they would say, ‘We will be freed by Thanksgiving.’ However, when Thanksgiving came and went, they were still around. Because of overly high expectations and harsh conditions in prison, they finally died broken-hearted.”

Actually, this is the case in all situations. We should neither be too pessimistic nor too optimistic in life. We should abide in the middle way, go with the flow, and understand all things are impermanent, like a dream or illusion. With the right view and attitude, we can be free from the grip or hold that wealth has on us. With money, we can be happy; without money, we can be equally carefree.

This is how the Buddhist teachings can be applied to life.

Practice to Attain Liberation

In our present society, everyone is under stress. How we resolve our stress is a pressing and serious question for study.

Although there are many methods in Buddhism, we will only discuss those methods that relate to concepts we have touched on.

Ordinarily, when we talk or go for a walk, our mind is filled with a whole range of distractions. When we cannot concentrate or stay focused, it is difficult for wisdom to arise. It is only after subduing the mind, when it becomes clearer and sharper, that our thinking is more focused and more effective in problem solving. This includes problems connected with running a business and earning money.

Actually, many of the exciting discoveries made by scientists and philosophers in the past came during meditation and in their dreams. In no case did it happen when the mind was agitated or in states of discursiveness.

How do we calm the mind? The specific methods are as follows:

Firstly, choose a time when all our tasks are completed; close the doors and windows, and turn off phones and other sources of distraction; then rest in the sevenfold meditation posture of Vairochana.

Essential Points of the Body — Meditation Posture

The seven essential points are:

1. The legs in a cross — legged position.
2. The hands in the gesture of meditation (dhyāna mudrā) — palms facing up, the right hand placed on top of the left, thumbs touching each other — rest hands four fingers below the navel.
3. The upper arms away from the body.



4. The body straight, the posture proper — without leaning left, right, front, or back.
5. The head bent slightly forward.
6. The eyes slightly closed with the gaze directed toward the tip of the nose.
7. The tip of the tongue touching the palate — breathe normally, neither too quickly nor slowly. This allows every part of the body to relax; it also calms the mind very quickly.

It is best to sit on a cushion when we meditate. The so-called meditation cushion should be higher in the back than in the front. If we sit on a soft sofa, our body will be uncomfortable and not relaxed.

Essential Points of Speech — Expelling Impure Chi

After sitting in meditation, the next step is to expel the impure chi or life — energy in our body.

1. Why do we need to expel the impure chi in our body?

Ordinarily, we are not aware of any connection between our breath and our thoughts; however, a true practitioner knows the two are closely connected.

Practitioners all know the posture, outer breath, and inner and secret chi circling inside the body are intimately linked. Just as we need to wash our bowl before eating dinner, a practitioner has to expel the chi associated with all his or

her discursive thoughts accumulated during the day before practicing meditative concentration. When the impure chi is expelled, all of the discursive thoughts, negative and destructive emotions are also purged. In Buddhism, this meditative technique is known as visualization.

Visualization is a very effective method in meditative practice; it is also scientifically based. This technique can clearly change the relative structure of the left and right brain. Evidence shows that sadness and happiness are connected with the frontal lobe of the left and right brain. The left brain is responsible for happiness; the right brain is responsible for sadness. When the left brain is unusually active, our feeling of happiness increases accordingly. Scientists have discovered very high levels of activity in the outer layer of the left-sided frontal lobe during visualization. In other words, meditative practice can definitely lead to a state of happiness and well-being.

In general, we are used to associating power with matter and not with the mind. Let us not forget sometimes the power of the mind far surpasses that of matter.

2. How to expel chi?

Firstly, with the left hand, press your thumb against the base of the fourth finger (a blood vessel is located there); place all four fingers on the thumb; this is called a vajra fist; then press down on the artery in the left upper thigh next to the groin. Next, with the right hand, press your thumb against the base of the fourth finger; except for the forefinger, place all three fingers on the thumb; make a circle with the forefinger pointing up; then press the forefinger against the right nostril.

Expel chi from the left nostril by breathing out lightly, three times in succession. When doing so, visualize the following: let all the negative emotions produced during the day change into a black gaseous substance, just like the impurities emitted from the exhaust pipe of a diesel-powered vehicle, and let it be expelled from the left nostril.

Switching hands now, make a vajra fist with the right hand and press down on the artery in the right upper thigh next to the groin; make a circle with the left forefinger pointing up; then press the forefinger against the left nostril, and lightly expel chi from the right nostril three times in succession. Following this, make a vajra fist with the left and right hand at the same time; press down together on the artery in the left and right upper thigh next to the groin; and expel chi from both nostrils three times.

Focus on Breath

After completing the above, place your hands in the mudra of meditation and rest the hands four fingers below the navel. With eyes looking down, focus completely on your breath. Breathe normally, neither too quickly nor too slowly; then count your breath. Each time, count up to seven breaths; when you exhale and inhale, that constitutes one breath. When we have finished the first round, go back to one, and count again up to seven. We want to do three sets of seven breaths each, a total of twenty-one breaths altogether. Based on the experience of past practitioners, it is better to repeat sets of seven than to increase the count at one time to, for instance, fifteen, sixteen, or twenty, since it is difficult to maintain concentration at that

level. Depending on how much time we have, we can decide how many sets we want to do. If we meditate for an hour and can maintain our focus entirely on counting the breath during that time, we will succeed in eliminating stress.

Why does this method work in reducing stress? When we place all our focus on the breath, our emotions become less disturbed. With concentration, there are no discursive thoughts. There are no thoughts of family, relationships, work, etc., no thoughts of the past, the future, or the present. If during this hour or half-hour, we can loosen up completely, we will enter a state of great tranquility. In this state, all our anxieties, afflictive emotions, and stress will be eliminated. This may last only a minute or so initially, but it should increase in time to two, five, ten minutes or more. The benefit to us is substantial if we can meditate at least twenty minutes every day.

Like a Dream

After the mind is settled, we should contemplate: what exactly am I so attached to or concerned with every single hour of the day? Using the logic explained earlier, we finally come to the conclusion that all phenomena are illusory. Once we have developed certainty in this view, and have a strong sense that “life is indeed a dream,” do not reflect on the question any more. Just stop the contemplation right away and abide in this realization for one, five, or ten minutes. We may have this feeling for only a minute or so at the beginning. That is not a problem; with repeated contemplation, realization, and abiding over half an hour or an hour, the practice will gradually change the way we perceive things, and reduce our stress.



Meditating on illusion and counting the breath are both effective ways of reducing stress. We can practice these methods even if we choose not to learn the Dharma. Although they are Buddhist practices, there is no religious component in the two methods. Just as yoga is neither Hindu nor Buddhist, the above practices need not be associated with Buddhism, and can be taken up strictly for health reasons.

The Best Time to Meditate

Before we retire in the evening, the stress we have accumulated over the day due to complex personal relationships and social activities is at its peak. At this time, if we can use these methods to alleviate our stress, we will be able to sleep soundly through the night.

Also, we can wake up an hour earlier in the morning and, after freshening up, meditate for an hour, half an hour, or even twenty minutes. By adjusting our mindset before going to work, the mind can stay calm throughout the day, which is certainly a plus for whatever we need to do that day.

Meditation practice is a commitment requiring time and effort. We should not be discouraged by a few unproductive sessions and give up. Like all things, we need to build the practice step by step. Without putting in the time, we cannot succeed.





Suffering is just a Paper Tiger



There are some very special methods in Buddhism for overcoming suffering. By practicing the methods, we purify our mind and attain a higher state of realization. In the short run we can reduce our stress; ultimately we can be free of the suffering of birth, aging, illness, and death.



Human suffering can come from many different sources. The methods for working with suffering are also quite varied.

Buddhism has a number of very special methods for overcoming suffering. With practice, the methods help us purify our mind and reach a higher state of attainment. In the short run, we can alleviate our stress; ultimately we can be free of the suffering of birth, aging, illness, and death.

In the past, people used to think Buddhism denotes pessimism and passivity, and teaches escape from the real world. Actually, that is not the case. The Buddhist understanding of human suffering goes well beyond this view. Buddhism is not passive; on the contrary, the Buddhist view on life, suffering, and happiness is intimately connected with the real world. We can all benefit greatly if we understand some of its concepts.

✿ SOURCE OF SUFFERING

How does human suffering arise?

Without thorough investigation, many people instinctively think suffering arises from not having money, not having enough to eat, not having warm clothing, etc. Actually, these are only some of the reasons why we suffer; they are not the main reason.

Original Source of Suffering — Clarity and Ocean of Stillness

Buddhism occasionally uses the ocean to describe our state of mind, and sometimes the sky and clouds to explain the essence

or activities of the mind. Here we draw a parallel between the ocean and our mind.

The clarity of the mind is likened to an ocean surface which is completely still — without sound, waves or ripples, it is calm and peaceful and seemingly empty of time and space.

In our lifetime, we have never experienced our innate clarity, even though all our suffering, happiness, and emotions come from deep within the mind. Buddhism often uses the term “clarity” to describe the most fundamental level of the mind (luminosity and clear light are other terms also used). This kind of “clarity” is neither visible light, nor non-visible light; it cannot be found in any electromagnetic spectrum in physics. It is a state of purity totally free of defilements. There is no happiness or joy, suffering or anxiety in this state of great equanimity.

Buddha Sakyamuni realized this clarity when he became enlightened. All Buddhist practitioners aspire to achieve the same realization. In the sutras, it is also called Buddha nature. Buddha nature or the innate clarity of mind can be directly realized and experienced. There is a saying in Ch’an Buddhism: One who drinks the water knows if it is cold or warm. The emphasis in Ch’an on knowing the nature of mind is none other than realization of this innate clarity.

Ignorance — Ripples

Ignorance is translated in Chinese as “wu ming.” The word “ming” refers to wisdom that comes from realization; “wu”



is a negation. Thus, wu ming means the absence of wisdom and the absence of realization. Although the innate clarity of the mind is always there, we have never recognized or experienced it because we have not attained realization. This is why it is called ignorance.

When fundamental ignorance arises, our mind has already moved away from clarity to its second level. What is fundamental ignorance? At this level or state, the mind, prior to entering clarity, is very calm and relaxed and totally free of thought — correct, incorrect, good, bad, painful, happy... .

To be more specific, the origin of mind is clarity; subsequently, within clarity, slight undulations begin to form; when these undulations appear, the first moment of fundamental ignorance is produced. Although the innate clarity of the mind remains unchanged at this time, fundamental ignorance has already separated from clear light to form our consciousness. Here fundamental ignorance is likened to a ripple in the ocean. Although the ripple is not yet a wave, the calm ocean surface is not quite the same and is showing signs of undercurrent.

Within Buddhism, the question of how ignorance is produced from clarity is a difficult one. How can ignorance arise from a state of luminosity? Actually, we can say the source of samsara is as far away as the sky's limit, because we have perpetuated in samsara since beginningless time; but from another perspective, we can also say it is right in front of us, since clarity at the present moment is the source of samsara. For those interested, there are writings on this topic in Vajrayana scriptures.

All celestial bodies in the universe, including the Milky Way and the solar system, have their path and cycle. Human life also



has its cycle; it continues indefinitely, due to its ever-present power or life force, until such time Buddhahood is attained. This life force is inconceivable, and perpetuates in a cycle from beginning to end.

What is the beginning? It is clarity. What is the end? It is still clarity. Clarity is the beginning as well as the end of samsara. There is no religious component in this principle. We can all experience and gain this realization regardless of who we are. That is because the structure of the mind is the same for everyone.

Happiness, unhappiness, realism, idealism, theism, atheism, etc. are all very superficial phenomena that are not at all on the level of clarity and ignorance. The source of consciousness is clarity. There is no time and space in clarity or clear light; all concepts of time and space arise from ignorance. However, in the brief moment when ignorance is first produced from clarity, there is no concept of time and space either. Just as in the Big Bang, there is no physical matter in the instant following the explosion, only later is energy produced from empty space; when the energy reaches a certain density, a fundamental particle is produced. From this fundamental particle, all kinds of matter are then formed. In the same way, from clarity, fundamental ignorance is produced, that is, consciousness — which is something undulating and capable of thinking and discriminating between events — is formed. After that, a fundamental particle is instantly produced; all kinds of matter are then formed, followed by the formation of the earth and celestial bodies. Ignorance is just like energy; how things are formed from energy that is unobstructed by matter and how the world is created from ignorance are astonishingly similar.



In Tibetan Buddhism, the *Kalacakra Tantra* describes three different worlds — external, internal, and secret — and their connection to one another. The external is the universe, including the solar system, Milky Way, etc.; the internal is the physiology of the human body; the secret is the mind. It is explained that our spiritual world is a universe; the structure of our body is a universe; the universe outside is also a universe. All three are closely connected. To a certain degree, they affect one another.

In our present culture, research studies on the mind tend to be overlooked; the studies which are available usually do not treat the subject in depth. Yet, many of the problems human beings encounter come from the mind. What we feel inside is often unrelated to external circumstances.

We all have our own view on life; relatively speaking, different ways of looking at things may be correct at certain levels; however, there is only one truth at the ultimate level. Hence, we should get to know the more profound view.

We should know our inner world is truly very miraculous. To visit this world, we rely neither on data nor examination by instruments, but rather on the practices unique to Buddhism. This is not blind faith; it is very real, just as food can satisfy hunger, water can change to ice under freezing temperature.

The undulations of fundamental ignorance are very similar to the discovery in string theory in physics. In the past, we used to think particles such as protons and neutrons are specks of matter. String theory tells us that the basic structure of matter is a vibrating string; with different patterns of vibration, a different particle appears. Although the particle appears like a speck of



matter, it is actually a vibration. We only see the illusion due to our biased vision.

When fundamental ignorance or consciousness is not vibrating, it is calm like the surface of the ocean, always tranquil. This is the state of the Buddha. When consciousness starts to move, even if it turns back, it cannot perceive its own basic nature. This is why it is called ignorance.

The mind is a complex thing — its continuum, annihilation, basic nature, and development are all governed by special rules. Apart from the Buddha, no one has mastered the way it works. A lot of people have substantial knowledge of the world, but they do not know who they are, what their basic nature is, and where they come from. Perhaps, when science reaches a certain stage of development, it will be able to validate the existence of these rules; until now, it cannot. Only in Buddhism are we able to do so. By way of practice, we can attain this knowledge since our mind is self-knowing. The Ch'an emphasis on knowing the nature of mind is none other than this self-knowing.

Self-Attachment — Waves

Self-attachment is the same as attachment. All of us have a natural attachment to the self or ego. Regardless of our education background and social status, we all believe we exist. Yet we have never questioned how we exist; we have never undergone scientific tests or used other methods and logic to validate our existence.

This inherent attachment is truly a misapprehension.



Actually, the self does not exist. From a conventional standpoint, we exist; no one would argue with that. However, if we examine more closely what a person is, we do not know what it is.

Similarly, people accept the existence of a material world and the idea that the world is solely a material world; no one has thought of overturning this obvious conclusion. However, on closer inspection, we find the so-called matter, molecules, atoms, etc. are all illusory. The fact is we have never been able to perceive the true reality of things with the eye.

Science can explain the history of mankind; it can project into the future and tell us what the world will be like a hundred years from now; it can explain the physiology of the human body, bacteria, cells, etc.; it can bring us a wealth of knowledge. But regrettably, it cannot tell us what the self is.

Buddhism discusses the self from two levels: one is relative truth; the other is ultimate truth. Our five sensory perceptions are called relative truth. Without rigorous examination, we consider the perceptions of our physical sense faculties to be true — if the eye sees the color red, we believe it is red; if the eye sees the color white, we believe it is white. All the values and the view of the world formed on this basis are very superficial.

Surpassing the perceptions of the sense faculties is ultimate truth. The true reality of the world and of the self is ultimate truth.

Are the appearances in the world the true reality? Is there nothing beyond what we perceive with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body?



We may not believe in the existence of God, a creator of all things, but we must believe in the existence of something profound and mysterious. The world is not what we see and think. The information we receive from the five sense faculties is incorrect; what we get is merely sets of illusion. Nevertheless, we still cling to our perceptions and believe they exist. In Buddhism, the term we use is attachment.

Fundamental ignorance, which is produced from clarity, begins to develop and at some stage takes on its own view. This view is self-attachment. The process by which ignorance turns into self-attachment is likened to ripples becoming waves. In Buddhism, the source of all suffering is this attachment.

The Buddha taught that birth, aging, illness, and death are a natural part of life from which no one can escape. When faced with this suffering, attachment is the biggest problem. Attachment clearly leads to suffering; how to face suffering is life's most important task. To better handle this task, the Buddha said we must learn to let go.

Ch'an Buddhism advocates letting go. Some people think this view is passive, pessimistic, and evasive. If we choose to enter monastic life because we can no longer make it in the real world, we are not letting go; we are just running away or giving up.

If we are successful in life and can let go at the same time, it is truly letting go. We can take responsibility for managing and developing a business so that hundreds or thousands of people, even ten thousand employees can make a living; concurrently, to attain personal liberation, we can also let go — let go of our anger, resentment, excessive desire, etc. In so doing, we can be



even more effective at work because there is no contradiction between taking responsibility and letting go of attachment.

Buddhism places emphasis on going with the flow and living in the moment. We should not become overly attached to the past and future but live perfectly in the present. Our suffering is unrelated to spirits or the Creator; it is only the result of our ego-clinging. If we let go of attachment to the self, we will instantly feel relaxed and at ease, free of suffering.

The sutras also state that many bodhisattvas in the past manifested as rulers in order to enlighten beings while staying free from attachment at the same time. Mainly, by letting go of attachment, they became selfless and worked completely for the benefit of all living beings.

Can ordinary people learn to let go? With special practice, it is definitely possible.

Afflictions — Billows

We usually think all suffering results from the lack of material goods. Undoubtedly, when we are poor, we suffer from not having basic things; however, even more suffering arises from spiritual emptiness, dissatisfaction, and unlimited desire.

As soon as there is a concept of “self,” there is differentiation between you, me, and him. When we become individual entities, what follows is resentment and competition amongst each other. In this process, greed and anger are like billows that engulf our spirit and prevent us from knowing what to do.

Excessive desire is mankind’s leading killer. Desire can



destroy, under certain circumstances, even a person of good character and high moral standing. If ignorance is a ripple and attachment is likened to a wave, our afflictions are like billows. Unrestrained anger and desire push us away from our basic nature, make us forget who we are and what we should do, and lead us step-by-step toward the edge of destruction.

Buddhism categorizes afflictions into three kinds:

The first is greed. Buddha Sakyamuni did not ask us to forgo greed or desire at the beginning, since it is actually not possible. The sutras state very clearly that certain kinds of desire are helpful to us in our development. For instance, the wish to improve the quality of our life is, to a certain extent, a form of desire; the wish to make more money in our work or business in order to help others is also a form of desire. The Buddha explained we need not cut off this kind of desire for now; we should first let go of the excessive desire which serves only self-interest.

The second is anger. In the sutras, anger is divided into many levels. When anger reaches a point where we no longer want to let go of it, it becomes hatred.

The third is delusion. The source of all afflictions is delusion, ignorance, and not knowing the true reality.

Buddha Sakyamuni said he could teach us the way to Buddhahood, but no more than that; ultimate realization must still come from within ourselves. The Buddha was not all-powerful. When he discovered this natural law, he could only hand us the instructions. If we do not put his teachings to practice, we cannot attain liberation.



Karma — Tidal Wave

The biggest problem that comes next is that of good versus bad. From afflictions to good and bad, the billows are now like a tidal wave. If we have hatred in our heart, we live in discord and commit wrong-doing; we use harsh language, physically harm others, and even kill. If we practice virtue with attachment, the good karma we create is imperfect. Although good and bad are clearly different, from the standpoint of clarity, both are already far removed from clear light. Whether good or bad, they are equally distant from the basic nature; hence they come under the same category and are known in the sutras as “karma.”

Our circumstances in this lifetime, whether favorable or not, happy or not, are all the result of the good and bad karma we created in the past. Just as the tidal wave brings great destruction to mankind, karma locks us in the endless suffering of samsara.

✦ ERADICATING SUFFERING

Returning to Clarity

Firstly, Buddha Sakyamuni did not deny that material things can resolve a lot of suffering. When we do not have food to eat or clothes to wear, material goods are of primary importance. However they cannot solve all our problems. I believe all of us in the twenty-first century are increasingly clear on this point. Hence, in the end we still need to return to the tranquil surface of the ocean; we need enlightenment. With enlightenment, we

can eradicate all our suffering.

What is enlightenment? It is returning to clarity. Starting out from clarity, we experience ignorance, attachment, afflictions, karmic creation, and suffering. In the end when ultimate realization is attained, we return to the original clarity and complete a full circle.

Ch’an Buddhism calls this our original face as the nature of mind has always been this way, whether we are angry, greedy, happy, or worried; it never changes.

How do we realize the innate clarity of our mind?

We gain this realization by way of meditative practice. Once realization is attained, we will suddenly see there is actually no suffering, happiness, anger, desire, or discursive thoughts in clarity. This clarity or Buddha nature is also called Tathāgatagarbha.

Within clarity are compassion and wisdom. A true Buddhist practitioner should seek neither rebirth in heaven nor supernatural power but realization of the true nature of mind wherein unlimited compassion and wisdom are already included.

When can we experience this state of clarity? There are three different times when we can enter this state of clarity:

The first is when we have gained realization of the nature of mind.

The second is during the time of death. No one understands death. Many people are unwilling to talk about, listen to, let alone confront death. Actually, death is not the conclusion



of life, just one of the processes of cyclic existence. The beginning point of this cycle is clarity. From clarity, all kinds of thought are produced; at the end when we die, we return to clarity. Again from this clarity or state of clear light, our next life is produced. Hence, the origin of all of our consciousness is clarity.

The third is during the evening when we enter into deep sleep. However, without training, we can never know the various transitions for going into deep sleep, dream state, and back to reality after waking up. This training can only be found in Tibetan Buddhism in a special tantric practice.

In *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, an introduction is given on how we can enter the state of clarity during these three times.

Tibetan Buddhism places great emphasis on transforming dreams into spiritual practice. The rationale is that there is an opportunity for entering clear light and attaining realization in the moment between the dream state and deep sleep.

At the same time, Tibetan Buddhism also places great importance on the after-death practice. Ordinarily, a person would not be interested in what happens after he or she dies; in fact, a lot of people are fearful and repulsed by death. Actually, death is neither terrifying nor mysterious. Death is only the total non-functioning of the physical body; the mind continues on. After we die, the mind can enter into clarity once again. With hypnosis which is currently popular, a person who is troubled by fear can locate the source of that fear and overcome the fear at its source. Similarly, with Buddhist techniques, a person can develop an ability that, upon entering clarity after he or she dies, will completely eradicate all the birth-to-death problems as well



as afflictions such as greed, anger, arrogance, and envy.

The goal in Buddhism is to enter into clarity. In everyday life, the longer we can abide in clarity, the more quickly compassion, love, and faith will grow; afflictions will also diminish gradually until finally Buddhahood is attained.

Normally in life, when we are troubled and worried, we should stop immediately to examine why we are unhappy. The body itself has no thoughts of happiness and suffering. Afflictions only arise in our consciousness. What exactly is consciousness? Reflecting in this way, we might just be able to enter into a state of total awakening.

For us to reach this ideal situation, a lot of pre-conditions must be present beforehand. However, it would not be a problem at all if we only want to return to the state of fundamental ignorance which, in our present situation, is the simplest, easiest, as well as most effective method for overcoming problems such as anxiety and the likes.

Some people think that problems of the mind can be solved temporarily with this method, but once we emerge from meditative concentration, we still have to deal with reality and the problems before us — hence meditation is useless.

Yes, reality does exist, but how to face it is up to us. Our attitude is what separates suffering from not suffering. If we are calm, relaxed, and open in the way we face reality, we will never be hurt. Although the problem remains to be solved, as long as we have tried our best, we can accept the result. If a problem cannot be solved temporarily due to our own limitations, we can, by maintaining a positive attitude, still accept the outcome with ease and not be forced into a dead end.



From the state of clear light, which is timeless and without space, to the formation of consciousness and life; from the union of our parents to the formation of a physical body and finally back to dust again — this is a life cycle. When we attain realization in the end, we will discover life is like a dream — ignorance, afflictions, and suffering never happened at all; it's always just clarity. There is something very profound here!

After gaining realization, we no longer have selfishness, suffering, and afflictions, but we can still have compassion and wisdom. With compassion and wisdom, we can benefit more people in this world; we can share what we have realized with others so that they may be relaxed, free, and happy in their lives. This is how the Buddha's teachings can lead sentient beings out of suffering.

Meditative Concentration

Our mind can be trained. Even without religious belief, a person can meditate every day. By letting go of all thoughts of the past, present, and future, we enter a state of great tranquility. This state is not clear light, although it is very similar. To abide in this tranquility for a period of time is meditation or meditative practice.

Meditation can reduce stress; at the same time, it can increase intelligence, eliminate fatigue, and control our anger. Although this type of meditation cannot take us to the state of clarity nor eliminate the obstruction of ignorance, it is quite good already. Apart from Buddhism, many ancient religions in India, as well as the meditation taught in psychology, all deal



with this aspect of mind in its state of fundamental ignorance. Of course, this is just ordinary meditative concentration.

During meditation, although our consciousness is likened to a ripple with slight undulations, ignorance itself is unaware of it. It's like when we suddenly come upon peace and quiet after a long day's work, we feel very relaxed, free from worry. So the more agitated the mind, the greater the sense of suffering and unhappiness that follows, the more likely a happy feeling will naturally emerge once calm sets in; this feeling is called meditative bliss. Many people become addicted to this state of bliss and want to meditate all the time.

A Buddhist practitioner must transcend both ignorance and the joy of meditation, and strive to realize clear light; a non-Buddhist practitioner only needs to enter the state of fundamental ignorance. In Buddhism, this state of mind is also known as store-consciousness, or *alaya-vijnana* in Sanskrit.

Why is it called “store” ? For instance, we assume that actions we have committed in the past such as killing and stealing are done and over with, and that no traces are left behind. That is not the case. Instead, a certain energy is stored in the most fundamental level of our consciousness. Within this base consciousness are all sorts of energy — good and bad actions, good and bad thoughts, etc., just like a storage. Hence, it is called “store.”

From the Buddhist perspective, a person is reborn after death. Although the physical body no longer exists, consciousness at the most basic level never ends but transmigrates instead. This is similar to moving computer software from one hardware to another. Thus, our temperament and personality are often



tioned to our previous life through information held in the store-consciousness.

This fundamental ignorance is a necessary condition for our practice. We can develop our innate potential if we stay longer and deeper in this state. The mind has great power and we have used no more than five percent of its potential. This is true even with the most intelligent people in the world, like Einstein and many scientists. The very core of this potential has not been touched.

Through meditation we can develop our innate potential. Firstly, we can develop clairvoyant power. For instance, the so-called heaven eye is the result of a change to the structure of the eye brought about by meditative concentration. This transformation is not a physical one; it is not a structure we can see but a kind of functional add-on to the eye structure. With this change, a person will have the ability to see what ordinary people cannot see, not only things far out at a distance but also the microscopic details of things — even perceive the past and the future.

Additionally, meditation can change our temperament for the better and correct certain physiological conditions. For instance, eighty percent of patients who have depression are inclined to take their own lives. Most of these people do not lack for food or clothing; their problems are created by the mind. We know that our body has a self-healing ability and that it can, with medication, recover from illness. Without the ability to heal itself, the body cannot recover even with medication. In the same way, we have to work with the mind to treat our mental problems. People who feel despondent and empty inside can,



through meditative practice, become happier and more open. Meditation also reduces afflictions. However, we should know it only keeps afflictions in check; it does not cut through or eradicate them, as there is no element of realization in this kind of meditation, only a quiet mind.

The Specific Techniques for Meditative Concentration

1. Meditation Posture

When we meditate, we must watch our posture. The seven essential points of the posture are explained in the sutras. To a beginner, the mind is very closely related to breath and physical posture; thus the correct posture is very important.

2. Counting the Breath

After sitting down quietly, we should focus completely on our breath. Breathe normally, neither too quickly nor too slowly; then proceed to count the breath. Refer to the discussion in the previous chapter “The Significance of Buddhist Philosophy Today.”

When we focus fully on the breath, do not stir up thoughts of family, work, and life. Do not review the past nor guess the future; let go of all discursive thoughts and bring the mind to a state of tranquility as calm as the surface of the ocean. If this is difficult, bring the mind at least to a state of relative tranquility like the ocean before waves appear.

In the West, many psychologists and meditators like to use the Buddhist method of counting the breath. Although this



method is also a form of contemplation in itself, it accomplishes the goal of meditative absorption — by using thought to drive out thought.

3. One-Pointed Concentration

In this practice, we place an object in front of us — a pen, a bottle of water, a grain of rice, or any other thing — and focus both the eyes and the mind completely on the object. Then cease all thoughts and just rest the mind. Maintain this state of non-distraction for a few minutes.

Initially, we may only be able to stay in this state for five minutes; once we become familiar with the practice, we can stretch it out to ten or twenty minutes.

Reminder

Normally, when we go into meditation, the mind is calm at the beginning; however, within a few seconds, subtle thoughts begin to surface, like the slight undulations of a ripple. We must watch the arising of each thought and cut through it at the very moment of its arising. We may not be able to eliminate all the movement in our mind at this juncture, but we should keep the disruption down to a minimum.

When the mind is in a state of calm, we feel very alert and sharp. By meditating every evening for ten or twenty minutes, people who are overworked mentally or under a great deal of stress can fully dissolve their fatigue from a day's work and maintain a relaxed and happy state of mind. Many corporate executives have found that they discovered solutions to difficult



problems during meditation.

If in meditation, we feel the world has disappeared, including ourselves, and that nothing exists, that is a very carefree and happy sensation. When we experience such a positive state of mind, we should stop meditating instantly. Why shouldn't we continue? If we allow this feeling to continue, scattered thoughts will be produced within two to three seconds to disrupt this state of mind. Hence, before the discursive thoughts arise, we should consciously stop, and then resume meditation again.

On this basis, some of the Buddhist practices and other techniques for meditative concentration will be easier to manage.

It's easy to talk about returning to clarity. However, to actually realize the state of clear light, we must invest both time and effort. Apart from the buddhas and bodhisattvas who can choose their own manifestations, all of us who are here in this world have neither the right nor freedom to choose where we want to go. When causes and conditions mature, we follow wherever they take us. Nevertheless, we are already here in this world and have learned how to return to clarity, the direction we take in life is in our own hands. We must appreciate and seize this truly unique opportunity!



How to Face Suffering and Happiness



Practitioners also encounter suffering and happiness. How to transform happiness and, in particular, suffering into favorable conditions in our practice is extremely important. Without the right method, suffering and happiness become obstacles to the path. This not only impedes our practice, it also affects the normal course of our life.



Buddha-dharma is not a philosophy to be appreciated from afar. Its wisdom is directly accessible and relevant to our problems in life. Unfortunately, most followers do not progress beyond an intellectual understanding of the Dharma, even those who have studied the five major treatises — Middle Way, logic, prajnaparamita, and other profound and significant texts. When confronted with life's unexpected difficulties, they are lost and unable to put the teachings into practice. This is like a soldier who is armed with very sophisticated weapons; when confronted by the enemy, he is caught by surprise and does not know which weapon to use. How regrettable!

Thus, in this section, we will discuss — how to utilize the teachings and develop the right way to face both suffering and happiness in life.



How to Face Suffering

There is suffering everywhere in the six realms of rebirth: if not suffering of suffering, it is suffering of change; if not suffering of change, it is all-pervasive suffering. This is especially so in this degenerate time. Even if we are unwilling to accept suffering, all of us have to confront it; we cannot ignore it.

Human beings do not have methods for facing suffering, thus they hope for happiness and are afraid of suffering. Animals are the same way — they hope bad things go away and that good things come quickly. A whole life is hence wasted in this expectation.

Practitioners also encounter suffering and happiness. How we transform happiness and, in particular, suffering into favorable conditions in our practice is very important. Without the right method, suffering and happiness become obstacles to the path. This not only impedes our practice, it also affects the normal course of our life.

In facing suffering, if we have the right view and understanding, suffering may not be harmful; otherwise, suffering will cause anxiety, mental disturbance, even self-destruction.

In Mipham Rinpoche's *How to Use Sickness as the Path*, there is a practice which I spoke about at one time (refer to *Wisdom Light Series*). However, what we are facing is not just sickness, but all kinds of suffering in everyday life. How should we confront suffering?



The guidelines that follow are based not on my own experience, but on the teachings and realization of highly accomplished masters.

The practice of facing suffering can be divided into four stages: understand what suffering is, know the origin of suffering, defeat suffering, and methods for overcoming suffering.

✿ FIRST STAGE: UNDERSTAND WHAT SUFFERING IS

In the Buddhist view, suffering is neither a material thing nor physical motion; it is a special feeling.

Feeling is a specific aspect of the mind. Objects like steel, cement, brick, glass, etc. do not have feeling — they do not feel either suffering or happiness. After we die, the body is just like a stone or brick. When it comes in contact with earth, water, fire, wind or anything on the outside, it does not react. It is no longer conscious and thus cannot feel suffering or happiness.

The mind has two aspects: one is discriminating mind, or “discriminating thought” ; the other is non-discriminating mind, or “non-discriminating thought.”

The eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body have feeling, but they do not reflect or contemplate; so these feelings are called non-discriminating thought. When we are sick, regardless of what we are thinking, our body experiences a great deal of suffering; this is non-discriminating thought.

When we see and hear something, the sixth consciousness



reflects and distinguishes between the good and the bad; this is called “discriminating thought.” The suffering experienced by the sixth consciousness is called the suffering of discriminating thought.

✿ SECOND STAGE: KNOW THE ORIGIN OF SUFFERING

When suffering or happiness arises, changes in brain wave activity in certain parts of the brain are detected. Thus some people believe suffering and happiness are produced by the brain. Actually, the brain is only a tool. Consciousness is dependent on the brain to discern and experience external phenomena, but suffering and happiness are not produced by the brain.

The sutras have often discussed and demonstrated that suffering comes from self-attachment, that is, attachment to the existence of a self. Here, the conclusion is set forth from a different standpoint. Suffering and happiness are not produced by external circumstances, but are closely related to our views and habitual tendencies. All suffering is created by our own attachment to things.

Although the suffering of non-discriminating thought is generally not connected with our consciousness, it can be transformed when our practice reaches a certain stage. However, our goal now is to transform suffering of the sixth consciousness, i.e., the suffering of discriminating thought.

For instance, when we are driving a luxury car, there is a sense of pride and giddy excitement. This happy feeling comes



from the sixth consciousness. From the standpoint of non-discriminating consciousness, there is very little difference between driving an expensive car and a nice ordinary car; but from the standpoint of the sixth consciousness, it is very different. Similarly, when we are wearing clothes with an exclusive label, we feel contented, happy, and special; this feeling does not come from the clothing, it comes from our consciousness. From the standpoint of non-discriminating consciousness, fine apparel and clothing with an expensive label feel the same. Suppose a person is given an ordinary dress to wear and is told it is a Chanel; if she cannot distinguish between an imitation and the real product, she will feel just as happy and contented.

If one day we lose possession of our luxury car and cannot afford to buy expensive clothing, or if we discover that our neighbor has a better house and car, we will begin to suffer. Even though we still have clothes to wear and do not lack for food or shelter, and even though our non-discriminating consciousness is contented, our discriminating consciousness feels ashamed and inferior to others. It's obvious that this feeling is entirely created by the sixth consciousness.

The Buddha did not deny that material comfort can bring happiness to an extent. The external world affects our happiness and suffering but is not the primary cause of our well-being. Happiness itself does not come from outside, but from the mind. We can find happiness only from within the mind and overcome suffering only by working with the mind. Thus, we should not be deluded into thinking money is the answer to happiness, because it cannot bring total happiness.



The French Enlightenment writer Voltaire, the mechanistic materialist La Mettrie, and many other philosophers in the West believed suffering and happiness come from the world outside and that happiness cannot be produced by the mind. Thus, for a very long time, the Western world encouraged people to look outside for happiness.

This encouragement reinforced the natural tendency of people to seek happiness outside. In the few hundred years after the Industrial Revolution, people relentlessly pursued material wealth and comfort. However, in recent years, despite the steady increase in income levels in the West, the index on happiness has continued to decline. More and more people are now beginning to feel this kind of pursuit is wrong; one can argue that all their effort has failed.

Buddhist teachers have repeatedly pointed out the importance of being mentally strong. People who are mentally weak are more likely to suffer.

What is mental weakness? What kind of person is prone to mental weakness?

Strength and weakness may be hereditary to an extent; some people are naturally strong, others are naturally weak. But the more important factors are environment, educational background, and habitual dispositions. Relatively speaking, a person who is born into a wealthy family and educated in a prestigious institution is more likely to be mentally weak. As a result of this weakness, the person is fussy and difficult to work with. When this disposition develops into a habit, it becomes increasingly serious, to a point where all things are repulsive and unsatisfactory. In the end, such a person will



find no meaning or happiness in life, and may even take drastic measures.

Thus, we have to be strong mentally; we must not let suffering take root in our mind easily.

To conclude, the origin of suffering is primarily our own attachment.

✿ **THIRD STAGE: DEFEAT SUFFERING**

At this stage, to defeat suffering is not to cut through the root of the suffering, which would eliminate any possibility of it arising again. This goal can only be achieved at the end when we attain liberation. For now, we should use meditation practice to turn suffering into the path, to prevent suffering from affecting our practice and life. In this way, we can “defeat suffering.”

The suffering we encounter in real life may be connected with money, relationships, marriage, etc. Without meditation practice, an ordinary person will have difficulty defeating suffering. Most people look outside for the source of their suffering; they also resolve their suffering by changing the condition outside. For instance, if a person is unhappy with another person, he will suffer if he cannot get over this negative emotion. To resolve the problem, he may try to injure and kill the other person. But he has not really defeated suffering this way. Only genuine practitioners can be freed from the pain of suffering and truly defeat it.



✿ **FOURTH STAGE: METHODS FOR OVERCOMING SUFFERING**

There are some therapeutic methods in psychology which I have some knowledge of. I personally feel that these methods are helpful to some people by allowing them to relax, but these are only temporary solutions and cannot cure the problem conclusively.

According to one psychiatrist, when a patient is suffering from marital problems, he tells the patient to imagine putting the spouse in a chest or bag, locking it up, and throwing it out of the window of a tenth-floor apartment; then imagine the spouse no longer exists and has disappeared from this world as well as from his or her life. This makes it easier psychologically for the patient to leave the spouse and let go. The method may also be repeated when problems arise again. Although this method sounds quite funny, it does help alleviate stress for some people. But it cannot get to the root of the problem.

When ordinary people encounter suffering, their first reaction is always to eliminate or uproot suffering presumed to come from the world outside. However, for ordinary people, some things cannot be overturned and uprooted; all they can do is to find whatever measures are available to deal with the problem at hand, to varying degree of success depending on the situation.

The Buddhist methods for overcoming suffering are essentially of two kinds: one is from the viewpoint of relative truth; the other is that of ultimate truth.



Methods of Relative Truth

When we come upon suffering — for instance, when we have committed wrongdoing or have lost an object we are attached to — we should consider it from two aspects: first, through practice, we can relieve suffering; second, more importantly, we can transform suffering into the path.

First: Eradicate or Moderate Aversion to Accepting Suffering

We should contemplate: this suffering does not help my situation; it also brings harm to my body and mind.

In samsara, a lot of suffering awaits us. As ordinary people, our lives are not all that different — we all experience birth, aging, illness, and death; we all die in the end. No one can tell us exactly how we are going to die. Our parents may leave us; there will also be problems in our marriage, family, relationships, financial status, and work. If we always reject, resist, ignore, or dare not confront and accept suffering, our ability to withstand pressure is evidently very poor. If due to our weakness, we cannot face and accept suffering, and instinctively make it a habit of running away from it, in time we become even weaker mentally. We dispute and fuss over everything. However perfect the environment is, everything is less than satisfactory.

If things go on like this, the mind will become increasingly vulnerable to pain; nothing can make us happy. This brings us even greater harm; in the end we surrender to suffering and become its biggest victim. Thus, we should be fully prepared now — we must train our mind before problems arise. Otherwise, even if conceptually we understand suffering and

happiness come from the mind, this knowledge alone cannot make a difference for us when we really need help.

People look at the same problem differently largely because of the state of their mind. Generally speaking, the mind of ordinary people is more fragile while that of the sages is strong. For instance, when the Buddha was about to enter parinirvana, he was surrounded by many arhats and practitioners. Although everyone knew the Buddha was dying and that they would lose not just a great but extraordinary teacher, all the arhats there were very calm. The exception was Ananda, who, having yet attained realization, was still an ordinary person. He stood crying by the side of the Buddha's bed and could not contain his sorrow. The arhats were not disrespectful. Because they had already realized emptiness, they could pass beyond suffering.

To sum up, suffering may not be suffering; happiness may not be happiness either. It's all about how you look at it.

When contemplating, it is best to do so when sitting in meditation, not while working or walking.

Take as an example, when we lose a person or an object that we are attached to, and feel unbearable pain, we should meditate and reflect: can I get back what I lost? If so, there is nothing to worry or feel sad about, I just need to get it back; if I can never get back what I lost, I can only face and accept the reality.

This meditation may not be effective at the beginning; we may prefer to suffer than contemplate in this way. However, if we persist, we will gradually be able to think through the problem. In samsara, losing a person or thing we love is a natural law we cannot ignore. Without exception, all of us will come upon that day; it is only a matter of when. Suffering



afflicts us and has a strong negative impact on our life, work, and practice. With repetitive contemplation, we will gain certainty in this view. Although this method appears to be relatively simple, we will benefit greatly if it is truly applied to real life. Everyone should try it!

If we can rely on this simple method to face suffering, we can overcome one problem after another. In time, we will find we can handle any problem however difficult, and that suffering is no longer suffering. Actually, there are advantages in suffering; the positive side far outweighs the negative side in its usefulness. Just as certain treatments are difficult for patients to bear, they are surprisingly effective in curing the illness. Hence, we should not make a habit of resisting suffering; we should learn to face it.

However, when it comes to practicing the Four Opponent Powers to purify karma, we should be more serious. That is, we must repent deeply our past transgressions and feel truly alarmed and terrified of our karmic retribution. The more penitent we are, the greater the power of purification is.

People in this world may not understand why they need to accept suffering. This is precisely the attitude that prevents them from attaining true happiness.

There is a story in the sutras about a king who lived a life of luxury. He never had to experience any discomfort; hence, if a pea were placed beneath eighteen layers of silk bed sheets, he would notice it and find it intolerable. Later in life, he not only lost his throne but also became a pauper. His only recourse was to retreat to the mountains where he chopped wood to make a living. Since he had no clothes to wear, he would carry the



wood on his bare shoulders. Over time, he no longer felt the suffering and considered this way of life very normal.

Although this is just a story, there are many such examples in real life.

When we come upon suffering, we should face it courageously rather than passively resist it. Once this hurdle is overcome, we can calmly accept a similar kind of suffering the next time and defeat it. In this way, we become the victor. If we persist, we can increase our mental strength and defeat all suffering.

Second: Transform Suffering into Positive Conditions for the Practice

If we know the mind, we can face suffering with fortitude and accept it with ease; we can even develop joy in knowing that suffering and happiness are rare opportunities for mind practice. We often hear the saying: Turn grief into strength — transform sadness, sorrow, and pain into a driving force that propels us along the path.

How does the transformation take place? There are seven methods:

1. *Transform Suffering into Renunciation*

The rationale is to practice suffering and renunciation together; in so doing, suffering can be effectively transformed into renunciation with excellent results. There are two kinds of practice: visualization during meditation practice; contemplation after meditation practice.



Visualization during Meditation Practice:

First sit on the meditation cushion in the sevenfold posture of Vairochana, then take refuge and the bodhicitta vow, expel negative chi, and pray that the guru and the Three Jewels dissolve into oneself in the form of light. Next contemplate:

Samsara is filled with suffering and no one is spared from it. From the leader of a country, high government officials, and the rich to common people, thieves, beggars, and even mosquitos and ants, etc. — they all have suffering. When confronted with suffering, wealth and power are useless. The only way is to transform suffering into the path.

The cause of my suffering is my own attachment. Once attachment to an object or a person is developed, it will definitely bring suffering. Thus the sutras are replete with the exhortation: Let go!

To let go is to be free of attachment; without attachment, there is no suffering.

The Buddha taught that all worldly phenomena arise from causes and conditions. The conditions for suffering and happiness are objective factors; the cause is our own attachment.

To give an example, good and bad karma created in our previous life or the life before are the causes and conditions for our cyclic existence. Even an arhat is still burdened with past unfinished karma in this life. If we can eliminate attachment, the past cause cannot ripen. Just as in cultivating a field, the seeds will not grow without moisture, the right temperature, and sunlight. Good and bad karma in our past are like seeds; without attachment, they cannot mature.

The Buddha taught that all phenomena are impermanent, imperfect, of the nature of suffering, and empty; it's not worth fixing any attachment on them. If by way of practice we gain this basic understanding, we can be free of attachment and suffering, and attain liberation.

In samsara, everything is illusory; we have no freedom or control over things, including our own mind. Greed, anger, ignorance, jealousy, and arrogance disturb and imprison us. As our mind is not free, we follow wherever external circumstances take us; this is normal, nothing to be alarmed about.

If only I can be like the Buddha, bodhisattvas and arhats who always abide in a state of great equanimity, free from external influences!

This kind of suffering is not new to me. Since time immemorial, I have most certainly experienced similar, if not greater, suffering innumerable times. Until the first bodhisattva ground is reached, all ordinary people will encounter even worse suffering in the future than the suffering they have already endured. Yet I have not grown tired of this world and samsara, nor developed renunciation, and still hope to find happiness in samsara. I am truly ignorant!

Although my suffering is unbearable this time, it cannot compare with suffering in the hell, animal, and hungry ghost realms. If I cannot even accept this pain, how can I face suffering in the three lower realms? Hence, apart from my practice and liberation, all mundane things — money, reputation, status, marriage, family, relationships, etc. — are temporary and meaningless. I must practice with diligence and seek liberation; if not, the outcome is really unthinkable. This is renunciation.



Contemplation after Meditation Practice:

When we encounter suffering, we can contemplate the above at any time or any place, e.g., when walking or riding in a car.

This practice transforms our suffering into a force that drives us forward along the path; it is also known as transforming suffering into the path.

Two effects are produced from this practice: first, through contemplation, we can calmly accept suffering; second, we can turn suffering into an impetus for cultivating renunciation.

Cultivating renunciation and bodhicitta are effective ways of eradicating attachment.

A practice must be specific to the problem at hand — we need to point all the spearheads at attachment and cut through it. Burning incense, prostrating to the Buddha, and reciting sutras are good practices in general, but they are not directed at attachment and cannot eradicate it. This is a very crucial point.

The practitioners of kusali chod^① are an example. To cut through their attachment to the body, they intentionally go to remote areas where mundane spirits inhabit, cut down trees, and destroy the mountainside to incur the spirits' wrath. When thunder, strong winds, and other terrifying signs appear as a result, the practitioners become aware of the presence of the spirits and have a heightened sense of self. Even the fearless are petrified and think — I have come to the end of the road this time and have nowhere to go, what do I do? When this thought arises, they immediately practice “cutting through the ego” which is based on the Prajñāpāramitā sutras, with exceptional results.

In the same way, if we practice renunciation when we are in the midst of great suffering, the outcome is distinctly better than when we are not suffering.

We often hear people ponder why they are the ones suffering. Without a doubt, suffering will come to us when our minds are so far from being free!

People who are non-practitioners do not believe in rebirth or cause and effect; they think all things come to an end with death, and often resort to taking drastic steps with their own lives.

Buddhist practitioners, on the other hand, can apprehend the basic nature of samsara, face suffering courageously, and cultivate a strong sense of renunciation. This is the goal we want to accomplish.

2. *Transform Suffering into Taking Refuge*

Because we have experienced great suffering, we truly understand samsara is filled with suffering; regardless of wealth or status, no one is spared.

For instance, in a harmonious and loving family where husband and wife, brothers and sisters all get along very well, everyone hopes the family can stay happy together indefinitely. Eventually, however, one member of the family will die; if the family is not prepared mentally, it will incur a great deal of suffering.

This is the same with wealth and reputation; the greater our attachment, the more we suffer. As long as we remain in samsara, we cannot overcome suffering.



We cannot rely on others to help us, not scientists, philosophers, nor our parents, friends, classmates, or colleagues; the only way to relieve suffering is to take refuge in the Three Jewels — with help of the Buddha and the Sangha, practice the Dharma according to the Buddha's teachings to eliminate afflictions and attachment. When attachment is gone, all of our suffering will disappear in that instant.

Unfortunately, the conventional thinking is just the opposite. When we encounter suffering, our first reaction is not to subdue the mind and let go of attachment, but to create external circumstances to keep suffering out. This is a common practice of all ordinary people. However, we have failed time and time again in this strategy and have remained until this day ordinary people who have not attained liberation.

Due to merit accumulated in past lives, we are human beings in this lifetime. We must seize this opportunity as humans to break away from samsara; the first step is to take refuge. As we begin to appreciate deeply the great qualities and the power of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, we will develop faith and eagerly seek refuge in the Three Jewels.

It's like when we are sick, we realize deeply how important and necessary doctors and medicine are to us; when we are not sick, this feeling is not as strong. It is the same with taking refuge. When suffering is imminent, there is greater imperative to seek refuge than in normal times. This can help us transform suffering into a cause and condition for taking refuge as well as develop a genuine devotion to the Three Jewels. Thus, not only is suffering not an obstacle, it is a force that advances us along the path.



If we follow this reasoning, we can moderate our attachment; with less attachment, suffering will diminish accordingly; with less suffering, our practice will also progress.

3. *Eliminate Arrogance*

Ordinarily, when people have money, power, talent, education or other qualities that are worth boasting about, they become very arrogant; they think they are superior to others and belong to the social elite. Some Buddhists, not being studious practitioners, may also feel disdainful of other people after having acquired just a slight understanding of the teachings and upheld certain precepts. However, when suffering strikes, everything falls apart. Only then do they realize they have nothing to be arrogant about — after years of practice, they are no more able to withstand even a small amount of suffering. With this realization, their arrogance dissipates; they also become many times more diligent at listening, contemplating, and practicing the teachings.

Without personally experiencing suffering, it is very difficult to eliminate arrogance by simply relying on visualization practice. Therefore, we should take joy in suffering since it helps us strengthen our mind. With a strong mind, we can withstand any suffering or negative affinities; difficulties not only do not obstruct our practice, they help us progress along the path.

4. *Purify Negative Karma*

Faced with suffering, those of us who believe in cause and effect and samsara will think: although I have not committed any wrongdoing in this lifetime, suffering cannot possibly descend



on me without a reason. All suffering is dependent on objective and subjective factors. Because of bad actions I committed in the past, I now suffer the consequences. Even a small amount of suffering can cause me so much pain. If I come upon even greater suffering in the future, how will I be able to face it? If I continue to create bad karma and do not repent now, I will have to bear even harsher retributions in the future. I will never be freed from samsara if this cycle is not broken. Just like getting to the root of the illness in order to be cured, if we do not want suffering, we must purify bad karma created in the past.

There are two ways to purify karma: one is to repent past actions before karmic retributions manifest to eliminate karmic obstacles and the likelihood of future retributions; the other is to accept karmic retributions to settle past karmic debts.

Suffering inherently sends us a message: in undergoing suffering, we repay or exhaust our karmic retribution. This is likened to crops; when they ripen, their seeds no longer exist. After bearing the brunt of suffering, a great deal of bad karma is thus purified. To bear hardship is to eradicate bad karma. How fortunate I am to undergo this hardship in the human realm, and not in the hell, animal, or hungry ghost realms. This is a good thing and I should be joyous. If I know how to act properly, I can make use of this suffering to engage in deeds which are useful for this life and the next, and moreover, to appreciate how important it is to purify negative karma. I will then strive to apply the Four Opponent Powers to perfect the Vajrasattva practice, and transform suffering into a positive condition for liberation.

In addition I should think: this karmic retribution is truly



harsh and difficult to bear. Although it has a positive side, I still hope this kind of suffering does not reoccur. Sentient beings do not wish this kind of suffering upon themselves either. I should still cultivate bodhicitta to free them from pain and hardship.

The reason we engage in listening, contemplating, and practicing the Dharma over a long period of time is to confront all suffering in samsara. Although studying the five major topics of treatises is good and praiseworthy, how useful are these teachings to us in real life? We should reflect on this point. Without realizing emptiness, they cannot help us. When we encounter suffering, however learned we are in the doctrine, we are still confused and frantic with frustration. The method introduced here is instead a basic practice which is very helpful in real life; it can be used anytime and anywhere. I hope we can all use this method which allows us to face difficulties in life without fear.

We can choose to practice one method or several methods. However, it is best to practice just one method in one session of meditation.

5. Transform Suffering into an Impetus to Practice Virtue

When undergoing suffering, we can also think: how fortunate I am experiencing just human suffering. If one day I must take rebirth in the hell, animal, or hungry ghost realm, how will I manage then? Thus I should be happy to bear the suffering before me.

To avoid suffering, we must accumulate merit and create the cause for not suffering by practicing virtue. This is the natural law of cause and effect.



Although we normally understand these concepts, it is only when experiencing suffering that we profoundly realize samsara is not as perfect as we imagine but is instead filled with hardship. With this we turn suffering into an impetus for practicing virtue. Buddhists are generally diligent in practicing virtue and refraining from doing evil. Through suffering, they exert even greater effort in the practice.

6. *Transform Suffering into Compassion*

The essence of Mahayana Buddhism is bodhicitta; the basis of bodhicitta is compassion. Without compassion, there can be no bodhicitta.

What allows us to develop compassion? It is precisely suffering. When we truly understand all sentient beings have to undergo great suffering in samsara, we can be comforted in knowing there is a law of cause and effect. We know that all of our suffering is created by negative deeds we committed in past lives and that we must bear the consequences. But other sentient beings may not understand these concepts; they perpetuate in hatred and resentment which bind them further in suffering. Seeing this, we easily develop empathy and compassion, sincerely hope all sentient beings can be freed from suffering, and willingly trade our happiness for their suffering — this is compassion.

The most important thing at this time is to cultivate compassion. In cultivating compassion, there are two kinds of outcome and benefit: first, since we understand the workings of cause and effect, we are able to relieve our suffering; second, having developed great compassion because of our own hardship, we can be unperturbed when we confront suffering again.



Judging from the current situation most people are in, what we need to learn the most is neither the advanced tantric practice like Dzogchen nor the profound theories of Middle Way and logic, but how to manage our problems in real life — illness, aging, difficulties at work, disharmony in the family, etc.

We should be serious about practicing these methods on a regular basis; otherwise, they cannot be of use to us when we come upon suffering.

7. *Transform Suffering into Helping Others*

The source of suffering has always been attachment to self-love since time immemorial. In any situation, we place our own needs above everything else; we only think of ourselves — for our own happiness, we destroy the happiness of others; for our own health, we ruin the health of other beings, even take their lives. There is no thought whatsoever of helping or caring for other sentient beings. Because of attachment to self-love, substantial negative karma is committed. The suffering we now feel is just a drop in the ocean of karmic retributions, yet it is already insufferable and difficult to face.

We should know all suffering comes from attachment to self-love. Because of this attachment, we create negative karma for self-interest and suffer painful retributions. When we come upon suffering, we do not understand it is of our own doing; we place the blame on others and develop hatred; with hatred, more bad karma is created. The result of this perpetual cycle of enmity is that we cannot extricate ourselves from samsara. If we want to be free of suffering, we must change our ways. From now on, we should help, love, and support all sentient beings with no ego attached.



There are two bodhicitta practices in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, “exchanging oneself and others” and “considering others more important than oneself,” that we must do. The underlying concept is firstly, when facing suffering, look for the source of suffering. There are objective factors but they are not the main reason, just auxiliary conditions. The fundamental reason is the negative karma we have created. All ordinary people have greed; when this converges with causes created in the past, karma comes to fruition. Greed is the attachment to self-love; like fertilizer to crops, it feeds karma and brings it to maturity. Highly-accomplished masters like the arhats also have karmic seeds which have not been completely purified, but because they have cut through greed, their karma does not bind them to samsara.

We often speak of cultivating bodhicitta, of giving happiness and taking suffering; however, when actually faced with problems, we only think of ourselves, and in so doing, suffer the consequences over many lifetimes. This is all due to attachment to self-love. Although ordinary people cannot cut through this attachment right away, it can be gradually reduced with bodhicitta practice.

Whatever suffering we come upon in the future, we should follow the method of exchanging the self for others: as we breathe out, imagine sending out to all sentient beings our positive karma created in the past, present and future, as well as our present physical and mental well-being; then visualize all sentient beings receiving our happiness in its entirety; as we breathe in, imagine the mental and physical suffering of all sentient beings transformed into a black gaseous substance which enters our body, dissolves the attachment to self-love in



our heart, and destroys it. We alone take responsibility for the suffering of all sentient beings, so that they may be far removed from pain. Lastly, meditate on the emptiness of self. This is a basic practice of “exchanging oneself and others.”

In addition, when encountering suffering each time, we should sincerely wish: may I suffer in the place of all sentient beings; may no one else experience the same kind of hardship. It is best if we can generate this aspiration without pretension; if not, there is still substantial merit in generating a contrived aspiration. In many sutras it is stated this practice has infinite merit. When suffering descends on us, we should always take up this practice with true sincerity. Then suffering becomes a positive condition for our practice, and we are also less likely than in the past to reject adversity. By accepting suffering, we are hence in the position to take suffering for all sentient beings and to make the vow. Although misfortune is hard on us, if it can assist our practice, we are willing to bear it. Over time we will develop a habit of visualizing in this way even in our dreams at night. To experience suffering under these circumstances is certainly worth it.

From beginningless time, we have undergone immeasurable suffering, yet we have never made use of adversity to relieve the suffering of others, to accumulate merit, or to cultivate bodhicitta; we have simply allowed suffering to take its course with nothing to show for it. We should all rejoice in knowing that we are now able to help others by way of our suffering!

The seven methods above are very important practices which are easy, convenient, and effective. They should be practiced not only when sitting in meditation but at all times. We must



persist in our effort and proceed in stages. When we start with relatively minor difficulties in our life, we can in time handle great suffering by transforming it into the path. If we follow this pattern over a long period, the results will be extremely evident; whenever suffering strikes, we can be mentally strong.

Our motivation for taking up these practices cannot be too selfish. If we do so just to alleviate our own suffering, the practices — although useful to a degree — will not be very meaningful, because it is out of selfish intent, not bodhicitta and compassion.

After coming out of meditation, we should dedicate the merit: To my guru and the Three Jewels, I pray that I may successfully confront suffering this time, and transform the pain into renunciation, bodhicitta, and compassion.

Many Buddhists pray daily to the Dharma protectors in the hope of avoiding obstacles in life. This is because they are mentally weak and are afraid to confront any form of suffering. When we make progress along the path and develop greater fortitude, we can even pray to our guru and the Three Jewels to grant us suffering and obstacles, and to the Dharma protectors for negative conditions, to deepen our inner strength as well as our practice.

This dedication, which is practiced after meditation, is also a method of the relative truth for overcoming suffering.

Many people think burning incense, prostrating to the buddhas, and giving to charity are the ways in which the Dharma teachings are applied to life. Actually they represent only a portion of Buddhist practices in life, and a very superficial one at that. The essence of the teachings is in taking



refuge, developing renunciation, compassion, bodhicitta, and the view of emptiness. Through these methods, we can face and surmount difficulties we encounter in everyday life with ease.

Methods of Ultimate Truth

Realistically, only when realization of emptiness is attained can suffering be overcome with the methods of ultimate truth. Those who have gained this realization can appreciate deeply that life is just like a dream. In a dream we may experience the death of our parents or loved ones and feel devastated. If we can suddenly wake up from the dream, no treatment or sympathy is necessary as suffering disappears instantly. If we do not know we are living in a dream, or know in theory but not from direct experience, then suffering is harder to resolve. However, before realizing emptiness, we can still practice somewhat by using the reasoning given in the Middle Way to ascertain the external phenomena which cause us suffering or the mind which experiences suffering is emptiness. More importantly, we should know suffering and happiness are basically just a feeling, a manifestation of the mind; they are not caused simply by external factors such as an enemy or natural disaster. Suffering does not exist in the world outside — the mountains, rivers, sun, moon, or stars; it exists within our mind. Without feeling, there can be no suffering. Everything is illusory, merely a manifestation of the mind.

The wise look inward to find happiness and the source of suffering. They know the seed of happiness and suffering is in the mind, external things lend only temporary support.



Because they have the right view, they can eventually eradicate suffering, and attain absolute happiness and freedom-liberation. In contrast, ordinary people look outward for the source of their problems. Because their direction is wrong, they can never eradicate suffering and fail every lifetime to achieve liberation. This is the difference between an ordinary person and a sage.

However, we cannot simply count on reason or theory to gain certainty in this view; we need to let the mind rest and examine it during meditation. Free the mind from discursive thoughts; neither review the past nor invite the future. The past no longer exists, the future has yet to come; if there is a mind, it can only be the mind at the present moment. Let us then check to see if the present mind exists. If we have been diligent in our practice of the preliminaries, we would know, in the instant we examine the mind, that the mind at this very moment is none other than clarity and emptiness. In *Beacon of Certainty*, the original face of suffering is said to be pure like the sky above the high plateau in Tibet, just emptiness. The great sage Atisha also said in his commentaries on the Middle Way that the nature of mind is clear and unobstructed like the autumn sky. What is perceived as suffering has long since dissolved into clouds of smoke; there are no traces of it left.

It is not difficult to realize emptiness. Unfortunately, because we do not practice the preliminaries, have not developed renunciation or bodhicitta, and have neither accumulated merit nor repented our wrongdoing, we only experience dullness or anxiety during meditation.

If our realization is not stable, our mind will return to mundane concerns and experience anxiety and suffering again.



Until we have subdued the mind, it will traverse back and forth between illusion and reality, between relative truth and ultimate truth.

If we wish to eradicate our suffering immediately, we must practice the preliminaries. We cannot bypass the preliminaries and think we can take up a different practice to achieve the same result.

The final outcome of all the practices is to transform suffering into a positive condition and force in our practice. If this target is met, it means we have successfully cultivated bodhicitta and renunciation. Regrettably, I have not reached this target either; however, that is not a problem, as we can practice and grow together. No one can succeed right from the start; nor can anyone fail indefinitely. It all depends on our effort.

When ordinary people are together, friction is certain to arise and cause all kinds of suffering. Apart from the buddhas and bodhisattvas, even the arhats cannot consistently bring happiness and avoid causing suffering to others. This is all the more so with ordinary people.

Although suffering is hard on us, if we know the method, it will strengthen our practice, cultivate the mind, and fill our hearts with joy. When this joyous feeling develops to a certain stage, our physical pain becomes less acute, our mind more open; we can face suffering with ease, and relate better with people; hence, we should embrace, even welcome, suffering when we encounter it. Just as in acupuncture, patients are willing to bear the pain of the treatment and pay for it, because they know they can attain good health in exchange. In the same



way, our suffering can bring us mental well-being, happiness, even liberation. We do not have to pay for suffering, only confront it directly and transform it into the path.

However, people who lack wisdom and courage are usually afraid of suffering and try to run away from it — their entire effort in life is to avoid misery; they have never thought of seeking liberation. The basic problem lies in not knowing suffering is a manifestation of mental weakness. This results in further restricting the mind, occupying it with fear of problems that relate to livelihood, family, and old age. Due to ignorance and fear, we unwittingly create bad karma. With the practices mentioned above, we can cut through our delusion, confront suffering with courage, open our hearts to others, and find joy in life.

Although the most effective practice for confronting suffering is Dzogchen, the method of the ultimate truth mentioned above — that is, the logic given in the Middle Way, especially realization obtained from practicing the Middle Way — is not unlike Dzogchen at times. We do not necessarily need a very advanced practice at this point. For most people, this method is easy and substantive, and is actually more important than the practice of Dzogchen and the development and completion stages.

The era of declining Dharma alluded to in the sutras refers precisely to the society at present. In this degenerate time, we must practice this way in order to progress. However deep our understanding of the Dharma may be, we cannot get past suffering and pressure in life because our practice lacks strength and stability. If we know how to apply these pith instructions,



the force of suffering and obstacles can help us advance along the path. Then, even suffering can be transformed into a driving force in our practice.

We must all place great importance on this practice and undertake the practice according to the Dharma. By way of these methods, suffering will not afflict us for long, nor will it be an impediment to our practice.



How to Face Happiness

✦ WE ALSO NEED THE DHARMA IN TIMES OF HAPPINESS

When ordinary people are faced with suffering and cannot bear it, suffering becomes an obstacle in their practice; their lives are also affected in many different ways. In the same way, when people are blessed with “happiness” — wealth, position, status — and cannot moderate their attitude, they become arrogant; they discriminate against others and even bully or oppress those less fortunate.

The worst thing about arrogance is that people believe they are better than everyone else and eventually lose respect for others. Additionally, they develop a mistaken view that money will resolve all problems. Not recognizing the benefits of practice and liberation, they plunge further into material pleasures and lack the impetus to improve. When advised to recite Amitabha or to practice with diligence, they respond,

“Everything in my life is progressing smoothly; I have all that I want. Why would I still need to go to the Amitabha pure land?”

This complacency, unwillingness to progress, and even greater reluctance to engage in serious practice are not the problems of any individual but phenomena typical of our time. When these afflictions control us, our practice becomes difficult and is filled with obstacles. To surmount these difficulties, we need special methods.

Ordinary people are very knowledgeable about worldly

matters — how to make money, how to live, etc. — but because they have never received Dharma teachings and are not educated on liberation and other profound issues of life, their values are often wrong and inverted. They only see what is immediately ahead and do not reflect on longer-term problems. Not knowing the fundamental nature of wealth and material things eventually gives rise to arrogance and laziness.

A lot of people opt for a life in the middle whereby there is neither great suffering nor happiness — a relatively placid life in which they can also practice the Dharma. However, an ordinary life such as this is not necessarily long-lasting. We cannot avoid the eight types of suffering, including birth, aging, illness, and death, and may even encounter great vicissitudes in life. Without the Dharma, how do we confront these circumstances?

Hence, it is not just in times of suffering, but also in times of happiness, that we need the Dharma. With the wisdom and the force of the teachings to face happiness, to share our good fortune with others, then happiness will not obstruct our practice.

Without the Buddhist teachings and practice, most people are still able to endure suffering; this is because they hold on to hope, even if it is very slight. Faced with good fortune, however, it is difficult for them to remain composed; with money, power, and status, they become megalomaniacal and self-important. Unable to return to their simple life before, and even less willing to listen, reflect, and practice the teachings, they indulge in material pleasures and gradually deplete their blessings.



A lot of people are envious of the rich and are mistaken in thinking material things can bring all kinds of happiness. Further influenced by materialism in the West, they relentlessly pursue a life of material pleasures. Except for those who understand the Dharma and are serious practitioners, many of the rich are not happy and are actually more troubled and afflicted than ordinary people. If we examine how they make and spend their fortune, we may discover countless negative deeds being committed behind the façade of glittering wealth. How can this be a blessing?

Thus the Buddha and many Buddhist masters explained there is no absolute happiness in the three realms, particularly the desire realm. Although there is happiness in life, it is relative and short-lived; within happiness are seeds of suffering.

Whether it is the temporary happiness we experience in everyday life, or the everlasting happiness one attains after transcending samsara, neither originate from a life based on material pursuit but from peace and freedom of the mind. When the mind is occupied by hate, selfishness, and desire, it is not free. To attain lasting freedom, the mind must be rid of the poisons of desire, anger, delusion, and arrogance.

As our understanding of the Dharma deepens, we can stay calm however great the vicissitudes in our life.

✿ THE SPECIFIC METHOD

The specific method is meditation retreat. By meditation retreat, we are not referring to a retreat lasting two to three



years or several months but to a consistent practice of one to two hours every day.

Methods of Relative Truth

First: Contemplate the Impermanence of Life

In accordance with *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* on the impermanence of life, we should contemplate: the wealth I have acquired in this lifetime is the result of good karma I created in the past and may be lost at any time. Hence, I should not grow attached to this wealth and become arrogant.

We should further contemplate: the wealth and position I have in this lifetime are all relative; in the end I will leave in the same way that I came — with nothing, except for the bad karma I have created. I must not be so ignorant as to think I can get away without practice just because I have a bit of good fortune now. I should be even more diligent in my practice and strive to benefit sentient beings.

By repeating this contemplation, arrogance can be diminished. Certainly, it is only after attaining the first bodhisattva ground that the seeds of arrogance can be eliminated altogether.

In *Compendium of Training*, Shantideva cited many sutras in describing a specific attitude: a king or an entrepreneur who has bodhicitta will think his wealth does not belong to him. He is merely a custodian who is responsible for discharging or distributing the wealth in such a way as to benefit sentient beings.



If bodhicitta is absent, wealth and worldly possessions are all causes of suffering which hinder us in our pursuit of liberation.

Second: Contemplate Present Happiness Doesn't Come by Easily

At the same time, we should think: although all that is defiled or tainted is the cause of suffering, I enjoy a quiet and relatively happy life now because of the merit I accumulated in past lives; this happiness does not come by easily. The sutras state that true and unparalleled good fortune in the world is to be able to live a relatively good life and have the opportunity to listen, reflect, and practice the Dharma at the same time. It is exceptionally rare to find people in samsara who fulfill both conditions.

We should know it is not unusual or special to be a high official, business tycoon, or social elite. In the six cyclical realms, the celestial beings, azuras, and some of the hungry ghosts have wealth and possessions which are immeasurably greater than that of human beings. Although the rich have substantial wealth, they lack compassion and the wisdom that comes from listening, reflecting, and practicing the Dharma. From the standpoint of Dharma practice, they are deprived and unfortunate.

By comparison, we can see how well off we are; hence we should first exchange our blessings for the Dharma and then exchange the teachings for a deeper and more lasting happiness. In this way, happiness and the practice can become mutually beneficial.

Third: Recognize, Appreciate, and Share our Happiness



We should contemplate: I must recognize the blessings in my life now. At the same time, I should cultivate gratitude and live a simple and unpretentious life; I should also learn to moderate my desires, be content with what I have, share my happiness, and give to the needy. A simple act of giving even in small amount can also be endowed with all the merit of the six paramitas. To give on the basis of renunciation and bodhicitta results in the accumulation of substantial merit. In this way, the mind will gradually settle down and feel free and happy. I must always remember not to be intoxicated with the few blessings I have; I must exert even greater effort in listening, reflecting, and practicing the Dharma.

Unfortunately, ordinary people do not think this way. After they have attained material well-being, they are still not satisfied; not only do they not feel happiness, they try to look for other kinds of happiness. Controlled by desire, they can never attain true happiness!

Fourth: Exchange Oneself for Others

When we encounter suffering, we can practice exchanging oneself for others; when we experience happiness, we can also practice exchanging the self for others.

From a mundane standpoint, we are enjoying our happiness when we have good health and material comfort; but from a liberation standpoint, we are wasting our blessings and happiness. In the sutras, the teachings remind us over and over again not to waste our happiness. Hence, when we are successful in our career or feel great joy in life, we must practice exchanging the self for others.



As we breathe out during meditation, visualize our happiness and the causes of this happiness — the virtuous actions and merits of the past, present, and future — transformed into a white gaseous substance which is then dissolved into the minds and bodies of all sentient beings. Visualize all sentient beings receiving this happiness and its causes, and thus being free from suffering.

Without this visualization practice, many Buddhists are no different from non-Buddhists — when they encounter the slightest bit of suffering, they grieve and fall apart, unable to manage even a basic normal life. If they are more fortunate than other people, they become conceited and self-important. Therefore, we should really put this visualization method to practice in our daily living. In time, we can even do this practice when we experience happiness or suffering in dreams. If we persevere in our effort, we can maintain equanimity under the most difficult of circumstances and advance in our practice without hindrance.

Although this visualization method appears to be very simple and cannot compare with the profound practices of Dzogchen or the Great Middle Way, it is the best method for us at the initial stage. There is a progression in spiritual growth which must start from the very beginning. With concerted effort, we can be sure of eventually attaining the highest state of realization.

Happiness is not founded on wealth or social status. Even without money, we can still live a life filled with ideals, compassion, high morals, and respect for cause and effect — a life which does not bring harm to others or destroy the environment. Regardless of how others see us, we can feel joy in our heart; this is true happiness.



Unfortunately, most people live by a completely different set of standards — lacking moral character, they are empty inside, emotionally unstable, and mutually distrustful; they inflict injury on others, exploit the land, destroy the environment, and place money above everything else. If all human beings behave in this way, there is no hope for this society and for mankind.

Although many people are Buddhist followers, they have not given sufficient time to listening, reflecting, and practicing the Dharma, and are in that sense no different from non-Buddhists in character. Within the Buddhist community, we can see disharmony and grievances throughout. Why do they not practice? It is because they do not know how precious human birth is and how rare this opportunity is. It is useless to buy a larger house or a more expensive luxury car. We should cherish our life and this exceptional opportunity. We should know this is the most fortuitous time; if we still do not recognize our good fortune and begin to practice, our blessings will diminish in the road ahead.

Methods of the Ultimate Truth

The method of the ultimate truth is to realize emptiness. There are two concrete practices:

First: The Middle Way Logic

Using the logic and reasoning in the Middle Way, we can gain certainty in the view that the world is illusory and that all phenomena lack inherent existence. When we are in a dream and dream of becoming a high official and having a lot



of money, the experience is not unlike in real life; however, when we wake up, we realize everything in the dream is unreal. Similarly, even though we are now a high official or a tycoon in real life, we will one day realize this too is a dream. The difference between real life and a dream is only in length of time; there is no difference in their basic nature.

Second: Directly Observe the Mind

This is also the best method: before practice, we must first understand what is perceived to be suffering and happiness is just a feeling, and is unrelated to wealth, position, or power. This conclusion is not only the underlying view in Buddhism, it is also the conclusion which psychologists, economists, and sociologists have reached in their research conducted over half a century. Moreover, there are substantial data to support this viewpoint.

It is like on a summer day, or when the sun rises and it becomes warmer, a snowman or ice sculpture melts and disappears. Or sometimes in the midst of a blue sky, clouds appear in the shape of animals or solid structures but suddenly vanish without leaving a trace. Before realization is attained, the mind perceives all phenomena to be real. Once the nature of mind is realized, it will recognize the nature of either mind or consciousness is non-existent, like empty space. Suffering and happiness, which are attached to the mind, can also vanish suddenly without a trace like the clouds and ice. As in the saying, “To what do you attach hair if there is no skin?”

Visualization Technique:

The first step is to practice guru yoga. The guru we refer



to here is His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche; all other gurus can be embodied in him. Visualize His Holiness and Padmasambhava as one and the same — the guru’s appearance is Padmasambhava, its essence His Holiness. After completing the practice, visualize the guru dissolving into oneself. Next allow the mind to rest and observe its basic nature. In that moment we will discover the mind is inherently pure, free of mental activity, tranquil, luminous, and empty. We will realize all things lack true existence, whether it is suffering or happiness.

When we come out of meditation, we should also know everything in our daily life is illusory like a dream. With this in mind, we can face any circumstance in life with ease and fortitude.

As with all practices at the initial stage, it is best to find a relatively quiet place away from the crowd to practice so as to achieve concrete results. If this is not possible, we should at least create a relatively quiet space at home and resolve to meditate one to two hours daily. By persevering in this way over a long period of time, we can also achieve the expected results. As our practice gains stability, our mind can stay calm and peaceful at all times as in pure land, and not be disturbed one bit by the samsaric world, whether we live in the city or in sacred surroundings. The body resides in the world while the mind abides in pure land.



Taming the Mind as in Taming the Elephant

Taming the mind is like taming an animal. When the mind is desolate and in despair, we should practice how to face suffering and transform adversity into courage and determination on the path to liberation; when it is immersed in pride and carried away by success, we should contemplate all things are impermanent and all defiled phenomena are suffering to overcome arrogance. We must avoid the two extreme states of mind and abide in the middle at all times.

Only the Buddha knows the most complete and effective way to tame the mind. This is a singular approach that scientists, philosophers, non-Buddhist yogis with miraculous powers, and self-proclaimed masters have not grasped.

There is a story in the sutras:

During the Buddha's time, many monarchs of the small kingdoms in India were devout followers of the Buddha; however, one king did not understand Buddhism and was not a follower.

On one occasion, the king acquired a very precious elephant. To train the elephant, he found a trainer who was well known for his skills. Using many different techniques, the trainer eventually succeeded in taming the elephant. He then invited the monarch to confirm his effort.

The king and the trainer rode together on the back of the elephant and set out to see the sights. Suddenly, the elephant started to go wild; charging forward, it crossed one mountain

after another, completely ignoring the trainer's instructions. When the elephant came to a forest, the trainer — who was helpless at this point — quickly called on the king to grab onto a tree branch, thus bringing him to safety. Meanwhile, the elephant continued to charge ahead with complete abandon.

Once out of danger, the king went into a rage. He pointed to the trainer and shouted, "How dare you lie to me! You put me on the elephant's back without having trained it, what is your motive? I will have you beheaded in public!"

Feeling wronged, the trainer answered, "I have indeed tamed the elephant. If you do not believe me, please wait another three days. The elephant will return by itself, and you can see for yourself."

Although the king was still angry, he was nonetheless curious and reluctantly replied, "I will give you a few more days and wait for the elephant to return. If things do not turn out as you say, I will definitely have you beheaded."

After three days, the elephant returned just as the trainer had predicted. To demonstrate he had tamed the elephant, the trainer placed a red-hot steel ball in front of the elephant and instructed it to grab the ball with its trunk. Without hesitation, the elephant got ready to carry out his instruction. At this instant, the trainer turned to the king and said, "Because the elephant has been trained, it will grab the steel ball; however, it will die immediately upon grabbing the ball. If this elephant is important to you, you must stop it from touching the steel ball before it is too late."

The king's initial skepticism turned to belief when he saw the elephant head toward the steel ball. He quickly called the



demonstration to a halt. But he was also puzzled and proceeded to ask, “Why did the elephant go wild the other day and disobey you? Why is it obedient today?” The trainer said,

“I can only train the elephant’s body, but not its mind. It was the scent of a female elephant in its mating period that drove the elephant wild. Under the circumstance, the elephant could not possibly have followed my instructions. Today the elephant is willing to follow my instructions because it is behaving normally.”

The king was convinced after listening to the trainer. He then asked, “Is there anyone who can tame the mind?” The trainer said, “Yes, Buddha Sakyamuni can.” The king instantly developed incomparable faith in the Buddha and set out to take refuge and make offerings to the Buddha.

This story tells us that however effective the laws in this world are in governing our speech and actions, they cannot subdue the mind. The only teacher who can tame the mind is the Buddha.

The methods for taming the mind are precisely those which we have discussed above.

Without these methods, many people who encounter great adversity fall into despair and may even commit suicide to end their precious lives. According to a 2003 report in *The Guangming Daily*, there were 200,000 people in China who committed suicide in the year 2003 alone.

Ordinary people have a common problem — either they cannot endure the slightest bit of suffering and want to take their own lives, or they become instantly self-important with the slightest accomplishment.

The history of mankind is replete with tragedies and endless wars which all resulted from the mind and are the product of excessive desire. We all know about the inhumane treatment of slaves in the West over a period of four hundred years in which black people were bought and sold like animals. This is a manifestation of mankind’s unrestrained desire at its very extreme.

Therefore, we must subdue the mind and prevent it from steering our body and afflicting us. By taming the mind, we will have the courage to transform suffering into strength and the hope to retake the path to liberation.

Both suffering and happiness are unavoidable in this ever-changing life. If the mind is not tamed, how can it stay calm?

Whether we are undertaking our practice or facing problems in everyday life, we should always rely on the Dharma to regulate our state of mind. This approach not only benefits everyone at the present but also produces inconceivable conditions for the future of all sentient beings.

The specific methods we have already mentioned are all techniques for integrating the Dharma in our daily life. A lot of people also recognize the need to bring the teachings into their life; however, without practice and the right view and understanding, what is there to bring into real life?

The practice after meditation is to apply the right view and understanding which we realized during meditation to everyday life.

I hope everyone can put these methods to practice. This is our only opportunity and one which we must not miss. If we



are not diligent in our practice in this lifetime, it is difficult to say when we will encounter the teachings again. Therefore, we must cherish these methods and this opportunity.

People now enjoy a more prosperous material life than at any time in the past, but they are also under greater pressure than ever before. Intense stress and competition have already pushed us toward the brink of collapse. We truly need the Dharma! Only with meditation practice can we help ourselves and others.

Although we are under a great deal of pressure, we are blessed with precious human birth endowed with leisure and freedom to practice. If we do not practice, no one can say for sure what will happen in the future. Even if everyone says “tomorrow will be better,” who can give us that guarantee? Natural disasters, famine, war, and violence can descend on us at any time. Let us seize this opportunity now!!

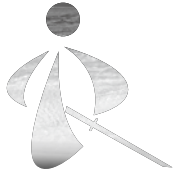
[Notes]

① Kusali chod: in *Practical Instructions on the Union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen* by Karma Chagme Rinpoche, “Kusali are practitioners of meditative concentration who have purged all worldly desires except for the desire to eat, release body waste, and sleep.” By abandoning all thoughts of self — grasping and attachment to the body, they cut through the four demonic forces and accumulate merit.

Kusali, meaning “beggar,” are yogis who leave behind all mundane concerns and retreat to the mountains, or those who don’t have the means to make offering to accumulate merit. They instead engage in a visualization practice which entails giving one’s body as offering.



Spiritual Equipment for Modern Times



In this modern age, we are enjoying greater material well-being than ever before.

But at the same time, we are also facing many problems: our trust in people and the index on happiness continue to decline; divorce, suicide, and crime rates keep rising; depression is even more prevalent. How do we resolve these problems? Buddhist philosophy can be very helpful at this time.



✿ THE TRAGEDY IN MODERN SOCIETY

In the seventeenth century, Europe fostered the modern civilization; in the eighteenth century, Great Britain started the Industrial Revolution. After the transition from an agricultural society to an industrial society, new technological processes contributed to building substantial prosperity and wealth for mankind. Indeed, in this modern age, people are enjoying greater material well-being than ever before.

However, we are also facing many problems at the same time:

Firstly, our trust in people has diminished. Although the cultural standard is on the rise and knowledge base is ever growing, our moral standards have eroded. We no longer seem to know how to be a righteous person.

In the last century, from the 60's to the 90's, there was a decline of 28% in the index on trust among people in the United States and Great Britain.

How does such a steep decline come about in so short a time? The main reason is a lot of people are no longer sincere. When people lack sincerity, they no longer trust each other.

More importantly, despite uninterrupted progress in our society, the index on happiness continues to decline, while divorce, suicide, and crime rates keep rising. Depression is even more of a problem.

✿ THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BUDDHIST CONCEPTS

TODAY

How do we resolve these problems? I personally believe Buddhist philosophy can play a very significant role in this area. The following are seven core principles:

Respect Cause and Effect, and Practice the Ten Virtues

1. What is Cause and Effect?

Buddha Sakyamuni in his time expounded the doctrine of cause and effect — all of the happiness and suffering in our everyday life arise not from the spirits or for no reason, but from two types of cause and condition.

The first type of cause and condition is called proximate condition (the causes and conditions which occurred recently); the other type is called distant condition (the causes and conditions which were produced at an earlier time in the past). When these two conditions converge, a result is produced. This is cause and effect.

People who do not understand cause and effect think it is very mysterious and filled with religious connotation. Actually there is nothing mysterious about it. If we are observant, we will discover all things around us — whether animals, vegetation, or mankind — are subject to the law of cause and effect. A cause will always produce a result of the same kind.

The ancients say: “You reap what you sow.” This is an



objective principle of cause and effect. Although we cannot observe the subtle relationship between cause and effect with the eye, we can validate its existence conceptually. A lot of new discoveries in science were also assumed to be non-existent at one time because they could not be perceived by the eye. The law of cause and effect is no exception; it exists even if it cannot be seen.

The law of cause and effect is a natural law. Buddha Sakyamuni did not pronounce it, nor did he create it; the Buddha only discovered it and promulgated it to all people.

As stated in the *Rice Seedling Sutra*: “With or without the Tatagatha, the essence of phenomena abides.” Whether the Buddha appears or not in this world, the natural law of phenomena exists and does not change.

There is a very big difference between Buddhism and other religions: the law of cause and effect is a natural law; even the Buddha cannot change cause and effect. The Buddha is not all — powerful; neither are the other buddhas.

2. How is Cause and Effect Generated?

Whatever action we take, whether it is killing, stealing, or freeing animals and giving, we no longer perceive its existence after the action takes place. However, a special energy is stored within the deepest level of our consciousness — the alaya consciousness. Alaya is a Sanskrit word which means storage. It is like a computer disk which can store a great deal of information.

Not only that, all the information pertaining to the previous life — including a person’s knowledge, personality, and living

conditions that distinguish him or her from others — is stored in the alaya and transmitted to the next life.

The alaya consciousness is the fundamental consciousness. All other types of consciousness, like the sixth consciousness, come and go; for example, they do not exist during our sleep or when the body suffers from a strong external impact and becomes unconscious. However, the alaya consciousness and the good and bad seeds, which are stored in the alaya, are always intact and unimpaired. Before the seeds ripen, we do not see them; but at some point, they mature and produce a result. Thus we have this saying, “good begets good; evil begets evil.”

3. Believe in Cause and Effect, Help Self and Others

Although most of the concepts the Buddha taught can be deduced logically, some are difficult to discover without profound insight like the Buddha’s. When Buddha Sakyamuni was propagating the Dharma, he also said it is difficult for an ordinary person to observe and understand cause and effect. Thus, before we reach a certain level of wisdom, it is best not to inspect the workings of cause and effect. Even if we try, we will not be able to come to any conclusion; we might even raise doubt over its validity.

Once there is doubt, we might act in our own interest without regard to the law and moral conduct; thinking others are unaware of our true intention, we bring harm and injury to them. If we genuinely believe in and respect cause and effect, we will be fearful of committing transgressions. This is because there is no connection between “cause and effect” and “whether others know our true intention.” When we commit



a transgression, this action, like a seed, is stored and will one day mature. No one is spared at the time it matures; where there is cause, there is effect — that is the objective reality. Without cause and effect to restrain us, our moral standards will decline to even beyond the bottom line. This will create even greater alienation among people and generate a lot of problems for society. Therefore, we should believe in cause and effect, and practice the ten virtues^①.

In whatever historical period or culture, it is always appropriate to practice any one of the ten virtues. Killing, stealing, breaking up other people's family, etc. are never tolerated in society, because they are considered by all to be non-virtuous actions.

Assuming mankind truly believed in cause and effect, there would be no killing, lying, and stealing; no contamination of oil, meat, milk powder, and other food products; no violence and war. People would interact with complete sincerity.

Therefore, the Buddhist teachings on cause and effect are of immeasurable benefit to modern society.

Being Content with Less Desire

To be content with less desire is also a Buddhist principle which the Buddha expected his disciples to follow.

Comparatively speaking, people in ancient times were more content with fewer things to go by. Technology is a two-sided sword; while it has created great material prosperity for us, it has also inflated our desire. If we deplete our physical



resources without restraint in order to satisfy this desire, we will ultimately bring on mankind's own destruction. For example, if everyone in the world were to live as Americans do, we would need resources equivalent to three to five times what the earth can provide. This is a very worrisome thought! Altogether we only have one planet!

Some organizations and environmental groups are doing their utmost to promote resource conservation and environmental protection. Although this is most commendable, it does not solve the problem at its source. To resolve the shortage of resources on earth, the key is to restrain mankind's unlimited desire. Hence, it is even more important for people in the modern age to learn to be content with less desire.

The nature of desire is that it can never be contained. This year's luxury goods become next year's necessity which we must possess in order to keep up with the times. In two to three years, the same luxury brands are taken off the shelf. Desire is like a treadmill; our footsteps can never keep pace with the speed of the treadmill. If we continue to feel happy as our desire grows, this may still be understandable since the depletion of resources on earth is a problem that future generations have to deal with, not us. However, the question is whether we can truly be happy if our desire grows with no end in sight. We cannot! As happiness is founded on satisfaction, when we incessantly covet all things, even if we are satisfied, it is only a very temporary feeling.

For instance, when a new technical device appears in the market, we purchase it at the first instant and feel very pleased. But technology is always on the change with first generation



products, second generation products, third generation products, etc. In time, the device we originally took great pride in is no longer fashionable; the original feeling of satisfaction and that of happiness gradually disappear.

This is the same with learning the Buddhist teachings. Some people are very excited and serious about the teachings at the beginning; a year to two later, they grow tired of the Dharma and no longer take the practices seriously. All of us have this natural tendency — we always seek new and fresh experiences to satisfy our desire and curiosity.

Thus, we must exert great effort in curbing our desire. It is said that “desire is a driving force for growth.” This statement is true in principle; without desire, we cannot accomplish anything, including the wish to learn the Dharma. However, when desire is excessive, it is not a constructive force; instead, it becomes a threat to our survival.

Although many recognize this problem, they cannot effectively bring their desire under control. To this end, spiritual practice is necessary. The specific method is to practice meditative concentration.

Letting Go

Among the many schools in Buddhism, Ch’an in particular places great emphasis on letting go.

Perhaps many people may question how they can let go when they have responsibilities to the society and to their family.



It would be a mistake to think “letting go” means “abandoning or discarding” our responsibilities. We are simply letting go of our excessive attachment to money, career, and things. As an ordinary person, we cannot possibly be unconcerned about family and material goods; however, if we become overly attached to them, we incur suffering many times over.

The problems we have in everyday life come from different causes and conditions; however, all causes and conditions originate from our attachment. On this particular subject, many modern psychologists have been trying to tell us the same thing. Freud and other philosophers also took the same view — the more emphasis and importance we place on money, the greater our discontent and suffering. Without having to abandon anything, we should let go of unnecessary attachment. Not only does this not hinder our career, it often leads surprisingly to even greater success. We will also feel happier and more carefree.

How do we let go of attachment? There are two methods:

1. Attain Realization

What is realization? It is complete awareness of the basic nature of life and the world. Upon attaining realization comes unsurpassed wisdom. A non-practitioner cannot understand this. Most people in this modern age live a very hectic life. When there are constant disruptions in our life, we cannot cultivate our innate potential or our inherent wisdom. Nevertheless, we should still make time for practice every day regardless of the circumstances. Before the mind receives any kind of



training, it is very vulnerable, often overwhelmed by the power of material temptations. However, as the training progresses, the mind becomes stronger as well. When the training reaches its ultimate point, that is, when wisdom is at its pinnacle, it is called attaining Buddhahood. Actually, attaining Buddhahood is not at all mysterious; it is no more than training the mind to reach its highest state of wisdom.

As ordinary people, however, we need not set such high expectations. We only have to cultivate more wisdom to handle the stress we undergo in life. If we practice the methods the Buddha taught, we can learn from our suffering and become stronger and wiser. Buddhism teaches how to “transform suffering into the path.” It means we cannot avoid suffering in samsara such as birth, aging, sickness, and death, but we can adjust our mindset and face suffering with ease. The “path” — similar to the path expounded in Daoism — is the practice. To “transform into the path” is to use suffering with skillful means to train ourselves. The most skillful means or method is to realize emptiness. Unfortunately, most people are unwilling to train themselves; instead they try their utmost to avoid all suffering.

2. Contemplate Impermanence

People always like to idealize the world they live in. Unprepared for problems ahead, they nonetheless still have to face them in the end. Even if we hope to, we cannot stay young or live forever. There is a natural law in this world which we must work with; if we go against or reject it, we incur suffering. Hence, we should adopt the right view and attitude toward life and the world.

All things including the universe, the Milky Way, the solar system, even the tiniest particle in the microcosm are in the process of change. How things change depends on causes and conditions at the moment, not on volition. The entity that is changing does not have a choice over how it changes itself either. However, causes and conditions cannot always be good; some are good, some are bad. We cannot foresee what will happen at any particular time in the future. For instance, a person may be fine now, but a month, a year, even an hour later, how that person will change is unclear since there are too many uncertainties. The things we cherish most or are attached to may be separated from us in an hour, a month, or a year — this is all due to cause and condition, the ever-constant natural law.

The higher the expectation we have of things, the greater the likelihood of disappointment. Hence, we must be alert to impending problems and changes. In Buddhist terms, this is the practice of impermanence. If we can face everything calmly and take hold of our attachment, we are learning to let go.

Of course, to truly let go, we must be able to see life as an illusion, just like yesterday’s dream, and completely cut through our attachment. This is neither necessary nor possible at this stage. As long as we are willing to rely on the methods the Buddha taught to train our mind, our ability to endure suffering will undoubtedly strengthen in time.

Gratitude

If we can appreciate life and the world we live in, we will feel great happiness. Our life will also be more meaningful. With



gratitude in our hearts, we will not complain or get angry; we will experience harmony in the workplace, in the family, and among friends.

How do we cultivate gratitude?

If we accept the Buddhist ideas, it is easy to develop gratitude. Although some people do not accept the Buddhist concept of rebirth, there is sufficient evidence to verify its existence.

As long as the idea of reincarnation is accepted, we can infer everyone was at one point our parent. When they were our parents in a past life, they were no different from our parents in this life to whom we are indebted. Because the body undergoes a special process when it takes rebirth, many wonderful memories are lost. Even so, a lot of things in our past still exist if only latently. Our mother in a past life could very well be the dog or cat we adore, a total stranger, or even a stray dog or cat.

Once we accept this idea, we can train in seeing all sentient beings as family; in Buddhism, this is called bodhicitta. In so doing, we become a loving and compassionate person. Everything that we do is genuinely for the benefit of all beings. Even a non-Buddhist can become a more tolerant person; at the very least, when he or she encounters an infuriating situation, his or her anger thereof can be recognized in the instant it arises and be brought under control.

If the concept of cyclic rebirth is not to be accepted, it will be more difficult to cultivate gratitude. However, we can still try to persuade ourselves in this way: if a person wants to succeed, he cannot do so without the direct or indirect help and support of a lot of people. Similarly, if we want to attain



Buddhahood, we need the help of all beings.

For instance, all of the practices in Buddhism can be classified into six categories — the six paramitas. The first of these is generosity. Giving money to the poor is one form of generosity; sharing our knowledge with others unconditionally and selflessly is another form; cultivating compassion for all beings is the other form of generosity.

Without sentient beings, to whom do we practice generosity? We depend on sentient beings to advance in our practice and to attain Buddhahood. Hence, we should be grateful to them.

Contemplate Samsara is Suffering

When told to contemplate samsara is suffering, a lot of people think the Buddhist perspective on life is pessimistic and passive.

This is not the case. Buddha Sakyamuni did not deny there is temporary happiness in the mundane world. Among the six realms, humans, celestial beings, and azuras belong to the upper realms. Rebirth in the upper realms is due to virtuous activities undertaken in past lives. Naturally the result of virtuous action is happiness. However, the Buddha also said if we examine our happiness more closely, we will find it is just an absence of any feeling of suffering at the moment. It is fleeting and relative, not absolute happiness. In fact, such happiness is also accompanied by much unhappiness. Looking at cyclic existence as a whole, most of it is filled with immeasurable suffering. Thus, the Buddha expounded: to say samsara is happiness is not entirely appropriate; to say samsara is suffering is just right.



If we know there is suffering in the world and are alert to impending problems in samsara and our life, we will be mentally prepared to take whatever steps are necessary to surmount them. This is doable because destiny can be changed.

Benefiting Others

In Buddhist terms, this is called liberating sentient beings.

In a competitive society, people experience a lot of stress and become increasingly self-centered, unconcerned about other people, other lives and their feelings. This preoccupation with the self leads to even greater stress. Continuing in this vicious cycle, no one can attain happiness in the end.

If a person is only interested in making money for himself, even if he succeeds, he will only gain temporary satisfaction. The consequences that follow are negative, resulting in problems that cannot be resolved with money. Ultimately, he will face a lot of suffering.

There is a Chinese book called *So Poor Only Money Is Left*. We may think the title of the book is somewhat distorted. However, a person who truly understands the essence of money, like Buddha Sakyamuni, or a business tycoon, would relate strongly to its message.

People generally equate having money with wealth, and not having money with poverty. However, having money is only a part of being wealthy; it is not its entirety. Similarly, not having money is a part of being poor, not its entirety. Some people are well off, but they feel empty inside and rely on compulsive

shopping to fill the void. This is only a temporary fix, not the fundamental solution to the problem. If only they could think of helping others at this time, that hollow feeling inside their hearts would disperse so much more quickly.

Within Buddhism, the Theravada and Mahayana perspectives on money are somewhat different. In Theravada Buddhism, the monastics are not permitted to accept monetary offerings from followers, or to touch money and precious gems. The sangha of Southern Buddhism abide by these rules even to this day; they do not use their hands to touch money or gems. Since they practice the teachings for their own liberation, accepting money for individual gain is inappropriate.

In Mahayana Buddhism, not accepting monetary offerings from followers, though not a violation of the root precepts, is a breach of one branch of the precepts. This is because the true spirit of Mahayana Buddhism is in benefiting all sentient beings. If someone makes an offering in the form of money, a monastic should give the person the opportunity to accumulate merit. Money itself is neither good nor bad; the problem is how we treat money. Also, the thinking should be: the money is not mine; I am merely the custodian who is charged with distributing the money to whoever is in need. I am just a manager, a distributor, but not the owner.

In my opinion, if a corporate leader or someone successful can uphold this view, not only will he not chase after wealth relentlessly, he will also be able to avoid feeling empty inside after making money, and even put it to good use by helping others.

An important concept related to benefiting others is to treat



all living beings as a whole and one's relationship with other sentient beings as that of hands and feet — if the leg is in trouble, the hand will come to its assistance; if the left hand is in trouble, the right hand will come to its rescue without the least bit of hesitation. Thus, even for a total stranger or a being who is unrelated to us in any way, we will also be willing to help. This is what the concept of being whole can do.

Using these methods to train the mind, even a very selfish person can change into a selfless person. Eventually, our work will no longer be a burden nor will we feel empty inside.

Elevating the Mind

A lot of people in this modern age lack substance. When they lose the things they possess — their wealth, reputation, position, power, etc. — they think they are left with nothing. Compared to prior generations, overdependence on material possessions has made them mentally much weaker. In a life preoccupied with material things, people become very restless. For example, if we are told to refrain from watching television, using our hand phone, or surfing the internet and to remain quiet for an hour, most of us will have a hard time with it, thinking we'd be bored out of our mind — this is the negative consequence of living in a material-oriented world. If one day we were to be stripped of all these physical things in our life, we would be vulnerable to great suffering ahead.

In Buddhist terms, this is called suffering of change.

Businesses involved in the development of technological

products understand the need to continuously upgrade their products. Most people also strive to scale up by acquiring bigger and better things — income, official position, reputation, property, cars, etc. However, few think of elevating their mind to new heights. When the mind cannot keep pace with the rapid advances in the outside world, suffering arises.

The Buddha said suffering can be transformed into liberation. From this standpoint, suffering is not a bad thing. If we can make good use of suffering, we will grow and learn from the experience. In Buddhist terminology, this is called transforming suffering into the path; since the path is the practice, it is also transforming suffering into the practice.

Hence, elevating the mind is extremely important. It entails a lot of Buddhist concepts and practices. The following are some simple methods for alleviating stress — meditative concentration, which is equally important to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

*** METHODS FOR ELEVATING THE MIND AND**

ALLEVIATING STRESS — MEDITATION

Specific Practice

Prior to practice, we should first finish our chores; then sit in meditation with the windows and door closed, and the phone turned off.

When sitting, maintain a state of complete relaxation with eyes open. Some people like to shut their eyes during



meditation so as not to be distracted by things on the outside. Although this approach helps to calm the mind at the start, we may get tired and even fall asleep in ten to twenty minutes.

The benefits of meditative concentration, the sevenfold posture of Vairochana, and the practice of expelling chi are explained in the chapter “The Significance of Buddhist Philosophy Today” and are not repeated here.

1. One-Pointed Concentration

After expelling the negative chi in our body, focus the eyes and mind on an object in front of us.

This object can be a picture, for instance, a sketch we have made. It should be small, not too big. Buddhist followers can concentrate on an object like a statue of the Buddha. Our entire focus should be on the picture. Try to keep blinking to a minimum and let go of all thoughts, whether good or bad. The mind can in this way return to its relatively natural state. Then abide in this state.

2. Chi Visualization

Select a syllable or a word as an object and imagine it on the tip of the nose. When breathing out, visualize the object is expelled along with the chi; when breathing in, visualize the object returning to the tip of the nose again. Repeat this again and again over a period of time.

3. Counting the Breath

Refer to the chapter “The Significance of Buddhist Philosophy Today.”

This is the initial stage of concentration practice. Thinking

we are in meditative concentration, we sometimes do not realize subtle thoughts have already arisen in the mind. Thus, we must be vigilant and bring our mind back to the object of focus as soon as we become distracted. Without vigilance, the mind may become scattered quickly and lose its concentration. The practice will see no result this way.

If this practice is preceded by some particular Buddhist sadhana, it is a Buddhist meditation practice. If we leave out the aspiration in the beginning and the dedication that follows, then it has nothing to do with Buddhism or any other religion. It is only a method for regulating the emotional state of mind.

At the beginning, we may only be able to concentrate for a minute or so. As we get better in the practice — when the mind becomes very still and comfortable, and all the pressure and afflictions have dissolved into this state of tranquility — we should stop there. If we continue, the mind will surely get distracted later on. So, stop before distractions appear; then refocus immediately. This way is much more helpful to the meditation practice.

If we plan to meditate for an hour, we can first count the breath for twenty minutes; then practice chi visualization or one-pointed concentration for forty minutes. To succeed, we must dedicate effort to the practice; the result will otherwise be less than ideal.

Conditions for Practice

1. Environment

The Ch’an monasteries often hold seven-day retreats. Each



phase of practice consists of seven days. Like receiving a course of treatment for an illness, we can go to a seven-day retreat or to two or more seven-day retreats. We can make use of a long vacation to attend a retreat; even a week can be very helpful to us.

Meditative concentration can be practiced not only at a monastery but also at home. If there is a meditation room in the house, that would be a good place to practice.

2. Attitude

It is imperative to maintain the right attitude every morning after waking up: today I must undertake an activity which is beneficial to others, and then practice meditative concentration afterwards. There should be no grudges held or unhappy thoughts just before going to sleep at night. With meditative concentration, dissolve all the stress, grudges, anger, and discontent, then go to sleep with a pure mind. This not only improves the quality of sleep but also helps one's emotional state, physical health, work efficiency, and mental power.

3. Timing

In a twenty-four-hour day, there are two periods which are relatively important for our practice: one is prior to going to sleep; the other is right after waking up in the morning.

A serious Buddhist practitioner will divide a day into four periods: early in the morning after waking up, morning, afternoon, and late in the evening before going to sleep. Those who work may only have time at the start and close of the day to practice. Each session should last thirty minutes to two hours. A practice can start with thirty minutes and gradually

build up to two hours, but no more than that. Otherwise, fatigue and rejection start to set in. The key to practice is not in making an effort for a while, but in being consistent with daily practice.

Reminder

Except when we are studying or taking a test, our mind is usually in a state of distraction; we allow our thoughts to go wild and do not take control over them. By way of concentration practice, we can substantially reduce the movement of the mind.

Since childhood, we have gotten used to examining things externally. By looking inward now, we discover there is actually nothing that we can practice or concentrate on. The mental faculty that we used to rely on for thinking and decision making does not exist in the brain or in the heart; it does not exist at all.

In the West, many classes are offered on alleviating stress, the content of which is precisely meditative concentration. For example, by attending an eight-week class and practicing every day, it is found — after undergoing an examination at the end of the class — that the ratio of the practitioners' right and left brain has changed (with gray matter concentration increased in the left regions of the brain). A lot of practitioners discover the classes are very useful in helping them face problems in everyday life. Even an eight-week class is sufficient to generate a very positive energy lasting several months. However, without continued practice, this positive energy will still decline gradually; hence, sustained practice over a long period of time is critical.



Meditative concentration is fundamental to elevating the mind. Through meditative concentration, discontent and negative thoughts accumulated during the day can be dissolved and interpersonal relationships improved.

Of course, the real upgrade — enlightenment and the complete elimination of all afflictions — is not as easy.

[Notes]

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- ① Ten Virtues: 1. Do not kill; 2. Do not steal; 3. Do not commit sexual misconduct; 4. Do not lie; 5. Do not flatter; 6. Do not gossip; 7. Do not speak evil things; 8. Do not be greedy; 9. Do not be angry; 10. Do not hold evil view.



Buddhism and the Business World — Six Standards in a Corporate Culture



Buddhist culture is an ancient culture which is universal and profound; corporate culture is a young culture with a history of just thirty years. Although they appear more than two thousand years apart, the two cultures can be very closely connected. If we are able to integrate both, whether on the operation of a business or as a guide to our life, the effect can be surprisingly positive.



✿ USING ANCIENT WISDOM

Buddhist culture dates back more than two thousand five hundred years ago and is a universal and profound culture. Corporate culture has its origin in the research undertaken by several Harvard professors in the 1980's and is a young culture with a history of around thirty years. Although they appear more than two thousand years apart, the two cultures can be very closely connected. If we are able to integrate both, the impact on the operations of a business as well as on the direction in our life can be surprisingly positive. This is because the wisdom of the Buddha brings light; the compassion of the Buddha warms the heart.

From a structural standpoint, corporate culture is comprised of four elements — product, organization, behavior, and ethics. Business ethics is the spiritual core of corporate culture; it is founded on the values of the corporation. The values of a corporation are critical to its survival and prospects.

In integrating Buddhist culture into corporate culture, it is not necessary for corporate executives to study the Buddhist teachings or become Buddhists. Having faith or not is unimportant. The objective is to apply the wisdom of the Buddha to managing and developing a business and to promoting the mental health of the employees. Actually, most of the Buddhist thoughts transcend the centuries in their greatness. Even after two thousand five hundred years, the teachings are still alive and indispensable to the spiritual well-being of people in the modern age.

✿ THE SIX PARAMITAS

Buddhist culture is extensive and cannot be easily condensed. Here we can only give a simple introduction to the six paramitas in Mahayana Buddhism.

The word paramita is a Sanskrit term which means “crossing over to the other shore.” Of course, from the Buddhist perspective, this term has a more profound meaning.

When a person or a corporation starts with nothing and achieves success along the way in meeting ever higher goals, this is likened to the process of crossing over to the other shore. If such is the case, how do we make use of the six paramitas to enrich corporate culture?

The six paramitas are generosity, moral conduct, patience, diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom.

1. Generosity is giving. In a corporation, giving is a very important part of its aim, mission, and culture.

2. Moral conduct does not imply going to the monastery to have vegetarian food, to recite the sutras, or to receive the precepts. It is a set of moral standards built on self-discipline. It is to know clearly what one should and should not do. The current problems that pervade everywhere such as contaminated cooking oil and milk powder are the result of moral decline. Upholding moral conduct is the bottom line for a corporation, with which it will not lose its corporate conscience for a profit.

3. Patience is especially important to people today. We live in a world where material goods are abundant, but spiritual sustenance is on the decline. This spiritual crisis has already led to all kinds of disharmony; thus we must learn to be patient.



4. Diligence is having passion for and exerting effort in whatever work we do. Diligence is the driving force of a corporate culture. If top management and employees are all dedicated to the company and to their work, the business will succeed. In the hundred years after the nineteenth century, among the more than one hundred corporations that existed in Japan at the time, only two were left in the end. Why were they so weak? Why was the lifespan of these corporations so short? They failed because of the absence of teamwork — or in Buddhist terms, the absence of diligence. Japan is generally recognized as having the most dedicated workforce in the world. If this can happen in Japan, the prospects are not good for other countries.

5. We have all heard of Ch’an Buddhism or Ch’an (Zen) culture, though our understanding of the term may differ. Ch’an culture has a history in China of more than a thousand years. In recent years, it has taken root in the West and has generated great interest there. Currently, Ch’an culture is already known throughout the world as a spiritual culture. However, the vast majority of people only know the definition of the term. Few actually understand the essence of Ch’an culture or know how to apply it in life and at work.

We all know Steve Jobs made many major decisions which were critical to the success of Apple products worldwide. In reading his biography, we understand these decisions were connected with and inseparable from his meditation practice. Through meditative concentration, the mind can be trained to reach a state of crisp clarity. When decisions are made with this state of mind, they can have a greater and better impact on the operation and the development of a product.



Meditative concentration is not only important to the management and strategic direction of a company, but also invaluable in promoting the mental well-being of corporate leaders and the employees. Without mental concentration or focus, how do business executives cope with all their social obligations? How do they dissolve the stress they are under? What about suffering from feeling empty and restless, trouble with insomnia and depression, and inefficiency? One can imagine how difficult it is to make accurate decisions under these circumstances. Meditation practice can help ameliorate, even eliminate, these problems. Money, which we normally place such importance on, is of no use to us at this time.

6. Wisdom in the Buddhist context is not about intelligence, which is normally associated with doing well in studies, in amassing wealth, etc. Wisdom and intelligence are quite different. Wisdom has a broader and more profound meaning; it is very closely connected with the perception of life and the world, having the right view on life and values, and so forth. Lacking wisdom, faith will turn into superstition.

Einstein once made a most interesting comment late in his life, “Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.” This is indeed the case. A religion must have wisdom and evidence; if not, it is reduced to blind worship, simply just superstition. Similarly, science must also take into account the human mind for its proper development. And the mind needs ancient wisdom to right its wrong, to bring it back to equilibrium. Either one must not be without the other for the two to be complete.

In the same way, the original intent of building a business is



to provide jobs and a better life for everyone. However, without wisdom, this intention is naïve.

The rules governing the mind are a natural law. They are not directed or controlled by God or any spirit. Buddha Sakyamuni did not create these rules; he only discovered them, and subsequently developed and promulgated methods for regulating the mind.

Whether Buddhists or not, we can all learn these methods. We need not necessarily be followers of Buddhism to read up on Buddhism, sit in meditation, or practice concentration. Just as in the case of certain drugs developed by a religious group, we can also use them if they are effective in treating an illness.

We acknowledge the vast majority of people cannot be happy if their livelihood or basic necessities are not met or guaranteed. Once food and shelter are provided for, however, we should not be content with just that but seek fulfillment at the spiritual or mental level. At this stage, things like philosophy, arts, religion, etc. that provide us with spiritual or mental sustenance ought to account for greater importance in our life.

What we most need to accomplish now is to transform the process of making a living into a happy one. In other words, whether we are a corporate executive or an ordinary employee, the real issue is how we can be a happier person in the process of seeking higher profit and better income.

The celebrities in industry and the entertainment business all live in two types of world or space: one is the public world of money, status, and glamour which everyone is envious of and aspires to; the other is a smaller, private world, that is, their personal space. Apart from the celebrity him or herself and a



few associates, no one knows what this personal space is like. Perhaps it is filled with unimaginable pressure, suffering, fear, mania, anxiety, and depression. When problems are no longer manageable in this small space, many people in high places will unknowingly transmit their negative energy to all the subordinates and employees. Intentional or not, no one is happy as a result; if serious, it may even cause some people to take their own lives.

For ordinary people, there is only their own personal space. Even so, it is important to take good care of this space for the benefit of both family as well as society. If a business leader can manage his or her own space and well-being, and in so doing set an example for all employees, everyone in the company will be able to experience both economic prosperity and inner happiness. It also helps the enterprise to be more united and dynamic.

How one manages and creates a fine inner space depends on wisdom. An intelligent person with towering achievement in the world outside may not necessarily succeed in managing the inner space. All the issues related to this task must be resolved with wisdom. Therefore, wisdom is the guide for the enterprise. This is when the wisdom of the Buddha is pertinent and useful.

Some people might think that Buddhism is about reciting the sutras and eating vegetarian food, while corporations are in the business of making money. When the two are diametrically opposite, how can they possibly be connected?

Although Buddhism does advocate being vegetarian and leading a contemplative life, Mahayana Buddhism — unlike Theravada Buddhism — is extremely liberal and humanistic.



We should not think the bodhisattvas are celestial beings, sitting high above, who have no afflictions and cannot be bothered with the mundane world. Just as a picture of a person is not the real person, the statues and paintings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas in the monasteries are not the actual buddhas and bodhisattvas, merely their representation. A real bodhisattva is a person who is willing to give selflessly of him or herself for the benefit of others. Anyone who practices Mahayana Buddhism can become a bodhisattva. It does not necessarily have to do with eating vegetarian food and living a life of contemplation, or with a person's work, appearance, and status. It is about what's in the mind.

We often hear the expression: Only help other people, never oneself. In Buddhism, the word "people" is replaced with "beings" ; hence the expression is "Only help other beings, never oneself." It would be too narrow a scope if we help only people. The word "beings" refers to all living beings. If we can help all living beings, we become bodhisattvas. In describing a good person, people often say the person is a "bodhisattva." Actually, there is a certain difference between the two in terms of their attributes. A good person is like the seed that produces a bodhisattva; when a good person elevates the mind to the next level, he or she becomes a bodhisattva.

How do we become a bodhisattva?

GENEROSITY

Solicitude, Recognition, Understanding, Tolerance, and Sincerity – These All Constitute Generosity

Although the goal of a business enterprise is to make money, it should not be its only objective. A business which is unconcerned about people will not last long, like a computer that does not have software.

If the management in a company is only interested in generating profit for the enterprise, the employees will also think only of money and their self-interest. This can lead to embezzlement and mutual distrust which hinder the progress of the company. To build a company, the employees have to work as a team; teamwork in turn comes from concern for others and generosity. An enterprise in the manufacturing sector can contribute to society by providing customers with better products; an enterprise in the service sector can offer customers better service; an owner of a business can provide the employees with care and various benefits.

Certainly, a small business owner cannot afford to pay the workers much at the start, but it is important to acknowledge their effort and strive to improve the work environment. Many enterprises run into problems not because of financial difficulties. To be able to take care of the non-material side of the problems is also necessary for the sound development and stability of a company.

We have a habit of thinking all things of the mind are useless if they have no monetary value.



This way of thinking is understandable but it dates back to the period of “primitive accumulation of capital.” We know all living things need to survive. As an example, when a man is held captive for five or six days without food and water, the only thing of importance to him when he is released is food. All other things like money, gems, music, philosophy, and religion are unimportant. They cannot satisfy his hunger at the moment. However, once he is full, his perception of things will begin to change.

A society, a nation, a business enterprise, or every individual is the same way. When basic necessities in life are not met, people focus on having money since they depend on money to survive. However, if they persist in this attitude after their livelihood is guaranteed, problems will surface.

Just as when the body is injured, it can heal itself; when the mind is hurt, it can also restore itself through gradual adjustment. Actually, the mind is often capable of producing miraculous results which we cannot begin to imagine.

For instance, the Japanese entrepreneur Inamori Kazuo single-handedly founded two Fortune 500 conglomerates. When Kyocera Corporation first began to operate, eleven employees once submitted their resignation en masse. Worried over their future, they threatened to resign unless they received higher pay and a bonus. At the time, the company was strapped financially and even had problems raising working capital. The only recourse Kazuo had was to make an emotional appeal.

He invited the eleven employees to his home, spent two to three days communicating his vision, and gave a sincere promise to all of them: if the company realizes a profit in the future,

he will definitely share it with everyone; in all his decisions, he will also take everyone into consideration. The eleven employees were extremely moved by his words and departed in tears. Subsequent to that, they worked side by side with him, united in spirit and character, to build a company that would eventually become a Fortune 500 corporation.

A corporate leader must learn to be understanding and tolerant. If employees develop business plans that do not succeed, the effort they put in should nonetheless be recognized. In this way, they will naturally be willing to work with the boss in good and bad times.

If the boss can share with employees the risk and benefit of the business such that the profit and loss of the company is everyone’s profit and loss, and treat employees as equals and strengthen communication, a foundation for teamwork and mutual trust will be established.

Although money is also a factor in building team spirit, it can only bring people together for a period of time. However, a spirit that is built on the base of sincere participation and genuine concern for the welfare of all will never get stale.

How do we learn to be understanding, tolerant, and generous with acknowledgment? The best way is to adopt the view of equality in Buddhism. At the same time, the mission and purpose of an enterprise should also contain the spirit of altruism in Mahayana Buddhism.



To Give Is to Receive

Perhaps someone might ask how we can solve our own problems if we only help others.

Actually, there is a hidden secret here which only someone like Buddha Sakyamuni can know. That is — when we let go of our attachment to the self and think only of benefiting others, we inadvertently receive all the things we deserve.

To give an example, when people rushed to help raise funds for victims of a natural disaster, some beggars and the handicapped joined in the effort by donating all they had — twenty dollars, one hundred dollars — to a charitable organization. At the moment, it appeared they had donated everything they had and were suddenly left with nothing. But perhaps because of their act of kindness, they touched and inspired others, and ended up receiving many times more what they gave. When they made the donation, they were sincere in their wish to help and had no other intention in mind. As long as giving is done with true sincerity, the person who gives will unexpectedly receive in kind — this is the amazing secret underlying cause and effect.

Among the five top marketing consultants in the United States is the author Joe Vitale, who wrote a book *The Greatest Money-Making Secret in History!* Although the book dwells on a lot of things, the most important secret is generosity.

The real secret to making money is: the more is given, the more is received. As a corporate leader, one cannot be stingy with the employees and should always share the profits of the company with them. Do keep in mind that generosity is the

seed of reward.

Of course, there are those who put this knowledge to work for their own gain. They give but their intention is not pure; being utilitarian, they actually end up cheating themselves. By giving with a pure intention, whatever is rightfully yours will come naturally.

Whether a corporate leader is truly concerned about the employees depends on his or her constitution and inner cultivation. If a person's character and cultivation are not up to a certain standard, it is difficult to be selfless. We should know if we are not happy in our personal space, whatever glory there is in the space outside is useless. Only by learning to give can we create a perfect world for ourselves both inside and out.

Cultivate Compassion and Build Happiness

Generosity is founded on compassion. We should not give to benefit ourselves, nor give for the sake of giving; we should give to benefit others. As long as there is mankind and cyclic suffering, compassion is always needed.

Every person or living being has compassion to a varying degree. As the saying goes, “a tigress will not eat her cub.” It is also the nature of fierce animals such as tigers, venomous snakes, etc. to care for their offspring. However, this compassion is very limited and is largely supplanted by hostility.

Ordinarily we consider our own interest first and do not think of others; sometimes we consider our own interest first, but will



think of others afterwards. No one is willing to completely give up self-interest to serve others. Only in Mahayana Buddhism do we find the concept of giving unconditionally.

The difference between Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism is in the scope of perceived object. In Mahayana Buddhism, everything is for the benefit of others; its compassion is unlimited, hence it is the “Greater” Vehicle. In Hinayana Buddhism, not harming others is a basic premise, but the aim is only liberation for oneself; its compassion is very limited, hence it is the “Lesser” Vehicle.

In the history of mankind, the greatest concept is the Mahayana Buddhist idea of bodhicitta.

The word “bodhi” denotes the true spirit of selfless giving. In any book on Mahayana Buddhism, it is all about selflessness and compassion. Although everyone knows bodhicitta is good, how can it be applied to the management of a company?

A good company should offer its employees not just technical training but also spiritual training. As an example, when employees have personal problems, Google will give them time off and even provide activities such as golf and bowling to help them fully relax. The result is exceptionally good.

Aside from that, major Japanese corporations such as Panasonic and Toyota hold meditational activities and encourage their employees to go to the monasteries to attend retreats. Following in the tradition of the local area or that of other religious groups, these corporations also hold a yearly ceremony, led by the head of the company, to commemorate



and pray for the deceased employees, or sponsor rituals for the dead in the temples. When the welfare of the staff is a priority in the business culture, it makes an employee truly feel “the enterprise is my family, my home” — the company is genuinely concerned about me not only when I am alive but even when I am dead and no longer contributing to it. Whether this effort is pretentious or sincere, it is nonetheless very useful. Certainly, it is best to be sincere with compassion; feigned compassion will be obvious to people sooner or later. Let us not lie to others and to ourselves.

The last general manager of Toshiba Corporation was a Buddhist and a model of compassion. He would spend an hour reading the *Lotus Sutra* every morning after waking up; returning from work in the evening, he would study the sutra again and meditate, declining invitations to social functions in general. He persisted in this practice, however demanding his work. He truly cared for the employees and thought nothing of traveling several hours, at the age of seventy, to visit workers who lived out in the countryside. As facts would substantiate, putting himself on the same level as the people he wanted to communicate with really motivated them. Where did his drive come from? The answer is Buddhist cultivation of compassion.

The cause of many problems with society today is a lack of compassion.

A while back, there was a major incident at the Harbin Medical School in which a doctor was killed and three people were injured. After the incident, a survey on the web was conducted — with shocking results. The 6161 people who took part in the survey were asked if they were happy or angry over



the incident. Among them, 4018 said they were “happy.” Even more alarming was one posting — “bring on the fireworks, wine, and music!” which actually received more than 5000 likes.

This result compels us to think: What has happened to people? How did we become so cold-blooded? Why are so many people happy over the death of a doctor? Why do they hate doctors?

Many of the responses were simple — doctors are no good. Why are doctors no good? Reasonably speaking, a doctor should be a person who is most compassionate and whom we rely on most. If the professional ethics of doctors are in question, what can we expect of other professions? Actually, these problems in society are all the result of a lack of compassion!

The Department of Mental Health in the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention once released the results of a study: the number of people in China suffering from varying degrees of mental illness exceeds one hundred million. In other words, one out of thirteen people is diagnosed with mental disorder. Moreover, this percentage is on the increase. Among the people with mental disorder, more than sixteen million are diagnosed with serious mental illness. This is a terrifying statistic!

Separately, according to a 2003 report in *The Guangming Daily*, the number of people in China who die from suicide each year is around 230,000. More current information indicate on average 287,000 people die from suicide each year (the equivalent of several Wenchuan earthquakes in number of



casualties), while another two million people attempt suicide but fail. If this situation prevails, ten million people will attempt suicide in five years; one hundred million will attempt suicide in fifty years. In the 2003 report in *The Guangming Daily*, experts believed eighty percent of the people who were disposed to suicide suffered from depression.

The World Bank and the World Health Organization expect depression to be the biggest public health problem in the world in the not too distant future. Apart from those who already suffer from the disorder, many people live in isolation and are increasingly alienated from society. The result of sustained isolation and anxiety over a long period is depression.

Depression leads not only to insomnia, lack of appetite, and refusal to communicate but also, in the case of extreme grief, to suicide. If this crisis is not resolved, there will be no possibility for happiness even if money is abundantly available.

Regarding this situation, experts have proposed a solution called “happiness prescription.” The “happiness prescription” requires everyone to be happy every day. But how people can be happy every day is a difficult question.

Presently, the most common treatment for depression is anti-depressants. However, these drugs have side effects and slow down our cognitive ability.

Actually, the best treatment for depression is meditative practice; meditation is not only recommended in Buddhism, it is also substantiated in many scientific studies.

There is a book called *The Joy of Living*. This book explains the process of realizing happiness through meditation and is



very persuasive in its argument. Now we know meditation practice really can elevate our feeling of happiness.

To summarize, compassion is the most important driving force as well as cohesive factor in a business enterprise; a company's contribution to society comes entirely from compassion. Compassion for the most part is rooted in religious belief. However, a non-religious person can certainly be very kind and loving as well.

A compassionate businessman will create a culture which is concerned with the well-being of its people. Why is suicide a continuing problem in some companies? When employees are under excessive anxiety and do not feel the company is concerned, they take drastic steps. Hence, every conscientious businessman should give priority to the welfare of the employees. It is my sincere hope that people everywhere can go to work happily and return home safely every day.

Creating Blessings and Helping Others

To truly feel happy, we must first practice the Buddhist teaching “be content with less desire.” It does not mean we cannot earn a living and provide for ourselves, our family, and employees; it means we should refrain from excessive greed and the desire to keep all profits to ourselves while cutting back drastically on employee benefits. To be content with less desire is to live a simple life and to share, based on one's own capability, the company's profit with employees and society. Like the business magnates Bill Gates and Li Ka-shing, who have donated 70 — 80% of their wealth to charity, we should



adopt the same spirit of giving back to society what we have taken from it.

How do we learn to give unconditionally? If we accept the ideals of Mahayana Buddhism, it will be easier.

Cutting Through Selfishness — Exchanging One for Others

In running a business, the boss should be considerate toward the hard-working staff and think: except for a few employees, most do not receive high wages; they are not economically well off; they live far away and have to work long hours every day just to make a few thousand dollars.

Then, choose an employee who is normally in poor health and is financially strapped at home, and put oneself in that person's place: if I were this employee or a member of his or her family, and not the owner of the business, how would I feel?

Sometimes we can even visualize an employee whom we dislike appearing before us, and think: if I were her father, and not her employer, how sad it would be to know she is neither obedient nor smart and consequently not well treated by her employer, and that she can no longer stay on in the company!

In this way, we will develop a special feeling-empathy.

We should further reflect: although she is not my daughter, she is no different from my daughter in wanting to be happy and to be treated fairly by her employer. If my daughter is treated unfairly at work, I will certainly be very unhappy. Thus how can I treat someone else's daughter unfairly and think nothing of



it? I am truly selfish and heartless! Truly shameless! Through this, we become aware of our own shortcoming.

If we can persist in training this way every day, we will naturally be motivated to share what we have with our employees, and achieve a good working relationship.

There is another Buddhist practice which is also very useful. When the mind is calm, visualize all our happiness and good health being transformed into a white gaseous substance which is expelled from the nostrils when we exhale and transmitted to all the employees; then visualize all the negativities which the employees suffer being transformed into a black gaseous substance and transmitted to us as we inhale. Moreover, imagine we alone will bear all their suffering.

Try it — do not worry about inhaling dirty air that will make us sick. It's not likely to happen as this is just a kind of training. But through this practice, we can discover how selfish we are; we will also learn to put ourselves in the place of others, understand that people have no higher or lower status, only different functions at work, and thus develop compassion. As compassion grows, we will be able to benefit society by bringing kindness to more and more people.

In cultivating compassion, there is no better method than the practice of bodhicitta in Mahayana Buddhism. I would recommend to everyone a book called *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. The Chinese edition of this book can be found in the Chinese *Tripitika*. While this book is required reading for all followers of Mahayana Buddhism, it can also help non-Buddhists in understanding how the Mahayana ideals and philosophy can benefit them in life.

Great Love and Ordinary Love

Buddhism classifies love into two kinds: ordinary love and great love. Ordinary love is the kind extended to family and friends — it is self-centered and conditional; great love is the kind extended to society and all beings in the hope they are happy and free from suffering.

Although we all have the capacity to love, our love is very limited. It is narrowly focused on our family, relatives, and friends. What's worst, we often appear to be loving and kind but are in fact very self-centered. For instance, when lovers break up, some may even take drastic measures such as killing or disfiguring the other party. This kind of love is extremely selfish and possessive — when expectation is not fulfilled, one gets berserk. Its root cause is the ego or self-absorption. Ordinary love will not bring us true happiness. We may enjoy temporary happiness, but as soon as the other party is no longer able to meet or satisfy our needs, we immediately show our displeasure and the love is gone. Thus, ordinary love does not last; it comes and goes.

However, great love can last forever. In Buddhism, this love is said to be immeasurable — immeasurable loving-kindness, immeasurable compassion, etc. “Immeasurable” means the absence of boundaries. The Buddhist idea of love does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, and nationality, or even between human beings and animals. It is an all-encompassing love which does not change.

Buddhism uses the words “loving-kindness and compassion” to describe “love.” “Loving-kindness” is a



sincere wish for all beings to be happy; “compassion” is a sincere wish for all beings to be free from suffering.

If every entrepreneur or successful person cultivates great love, this positive force will be transmitted to his or her employees, family, relatives, and friends, even to the entire society and to the world.

✿ UPHOLDING PRECEPTS

Upholding the precepts is to purge unwholesome actions and to exercise proper adjustment and restraint in conduct. In our present society, there is a real need to exert self-restraint. When people give in to reckless freedom and disregard for others, anything can happen. Although we all want our freedom, especially in the West where it is a fundamental right, we must also be vigilant in thought and in our action at the same time. Consider a world without law and ethics, where people did exactly as they pleased, such a world would be chaotic.

In Buddhism, self-restraint is founded on the principle of cause and effect and altruistic values.

Cause and Effect Pervades Regardless of Our Belief

“You reap what you sow” — this is the underlying concept in cause and effect. That good begets good, evil begets evil, is also a view which is beyond question. From a legal standpoint, when a person violates the law but is never exposed, the person is not subject to punishment. However, that is not the case with



cause and effect. Even if a person’s actions are not exposed, the person will still suffer the consequences; this is a natural law. With or without belief, no one is outside the law of cause and effect.

The laws and regulations in every country are man-made. Most are set up on the basis of individual interests and represent a form of binding between people. The cause and effect expounded in Buddhism, on the other hand, is a binding among all beings. Whether it’s between man and animal, or between animal and animal, all must follow this law. Whoever violates this law suffers the consequences.

With an understanding of cause and effect, we become selective in our actions and know what to do and what not to do. In “good begets good, evil begets evil,” good and evil can very simply be stated as follows: whatever is harmful to other beings is evil; whatever is helpful to other beings is good. If good and evil are the ethical standard for a corporation, it can foster honest management and employees who in turn will work toward a common goal — to be responsible to society and to customers by delivering products which meet the required standard. Knowing what actions to take and reject based on cause and effect results in greater attention to honesty and trust. With honesty and trust, we can create a win-win situation for both the corporation and the customers.

Business transactions can be divided into three levels: at the lowest level, the enterprise makes a profit but at the expense of the customer — this kind of transaction is short-lived since no one will want to deal with the enterprise again following a bad experience or two; at the middle level, the enterprise



loses money but the customer stands to gain; at the highest level, the enterprise and the customer both come out ahead. An enterprise which can produce gains for itself as well as the customer has a good future. Conversely, an enterprise which does not understand the workings of cause and effect and will do whatever it takes just to make money will perish.

Actually, there is nothing mysterious about the Buddhist doctrine of cause and effect; it is because many people do not understand Buddhism that it appears mysterious. Moreover, some adherents of Buddhism like to act as if they know something about supernatural power; in so doing, they make common things mysterious and ordinary truth divine, thereby misleading a lot of people.

Benefiting Others

There are some things we must do out of compassion. There are some things we cannot do because they conflict with compassion.

If there is love and an aspiration to benefit others, people will not act against their conscience and harm others; neither will there be unethical practices in the marketplace. This is good not only for business but also the entire society and all living beings.

✿ PATIENCE

In Buddhism, patience is comprised of three parts: first, to endure hardship for the practice; second, to tolerate insult and oppression from others during the course of practice; third, to accept the profound Buddhist views without being frightened or shocked.

Patience should and can be applied to business management as follows: first, to endure hardship in running a business; second, to tolerate and accommodate competitors in the business; third, to accept and acknowledge with courage any new management technique, technology, or product which is introduced in the business, instead of rejecting the innovation for being unconventional or superior to one's own.

Enduring Hardship

Learning to bear hardship is very important. For a long time, we have gotten used to allowing our desire to grow unchecked and filling that insatiable desire by every possible means. When we are poor, we are content to have just food and clothing. As soon as this basic requirement is met, we begin to look around for other things to acquire. As desire continues to grow in power, we willingly surrender to its command. As a result, we become increasingly vulnerable and dissatisfied, blaming everyone around us — country, society, friends, and family.

For example, a lot of wealthy parents send their children to prestigious schools and provide for their every need — the best there can be, whether it's food, dwellings, or cars. At the



same time, parents are extremely protective and are hesitant to reprimand them over any wrongdoing. While the intent may be to give them the best education and to prepare them for success in life, this approach inadvertently diminishes the children's ability to withstand pressure in the real world. The facts are true to the saying, "Without the bitter cold, how can the scent of plum blossom assail the senses?" When these people enter society without any mental preparation, they are likely to flinch from even minor difficulties at work, with family and personal relationships. They simply will not be able to cope and may easily become depressed and anxious; in the worst case, some may even take extreme measures.

By enduring hardship, Buddhism is certainly not advocating asceticism. However, some setback or hardship in life is not necessarily a bad thing. Often times, suffering and obstacles are actually a strong impetus for us.

Buddhism teaches us to face suffering in the right way. We cannot run away from suffering; we should accept all circumstances with an open heart and embrace hardship. In so doing, we are able to transform suffering into a positive force or see it as a good teacher and friend.

Traditionally, we always reject suffering or try to avoid it; however, suffering does not go away because we reject it. The world is in a state of constant change. No one has complete control over the future of one's business and family, even one's own future. All things in the future are uncertain; all changes that take place are dependent on various factors in the present; these factors in the present also change due to various other factors.



Thus the Buddha said samsara is filled with suffering and is impermanent. We should discipline or train ourselves and have the courage to confront this world. If this kind of spirit can be instilled in every employee, I believe we can prevent tragedies such as the succession of suicides that took place at an industrial compound.

How do we train our mind to face suffering?

First, don't follow desire completely. If we give in to our every desire, we are feeding it. One day when we can no longer satisfy its every whim, it will take revenge on us. It will bring us to our knees and make us slaves to material possessions.

We all know, in prior times of poverty, few people suffered from the ailments that exist today — high cholesterol, high blood pressure, etc. These ailments arise because of excessive consumption. There is a limit to how much we can consume, whether mentally or physically; problems arise when this limit is exceeded.

Actually, we do not need a lot of material goods to attain a sense of well-being. Sometimes, a very insignificant thing can bring us happiness; moreover, this sense of well-being can far surpass that which an expensive object can bring. Hence, it is imperative we learn to moderate our desire.

Second, do not idealize this life or the world around us. Instead, try to discover the imperfections of this world and be mentally prepared for impending suffering and ways to transcend it. Attachment to fame, wealth, or personal relationships should not go overboard, or it will certainly make us suffer.



Third, have compassion and a sense of responsibility. The founders of many of the top five hundred listed companies in the world faced very difficult challenges at the start of their business. The main factor in their success was compassion. They were willing to serve people unconditionally because they cared. With this motivation, they were undeterred by failure and disappointments and had the courage to move on. If our concern is only with the self, we will give up when we encounter the slightest setback: the profit I have gained from running this business has given me only a very small amount of satisfaction; considering all the difficulties I must surmount, it hardly seems worth it. If we think this way, we may close the business, or file for bankruptcy. However, if there is compassion and an aspiration to serve a certain group of people, even mankind or all living beings, we will go all the way regardless of the hardship we have to undergo. The end result of such persistence is success. This is true in any situation — persist, and you will succeed.

Tolerance

It is common to see competition among businesses. We should be tolerant of our competitors. Even if they cannot be trusted, are unethical, and bring harm to us, we should still treat them with patience. If in the course of competition, we fail once or twice, we should nonetheless remain calm and find a sense of balance. Do not act impulsively and commit a serious transgression by violating the law of cause and effect. When confrontations with competitors or customers are unavoidable, we must learn to face them with an open mind.

Accept and Support Innovation

When a new management technique, technology, or product is introduced, we need to have the courage to accept innovation and the challenge it brings. We should do our best to support innovation; if it is difficult to do so for the time being, we should neither resist the change nor repress it. Even if our competitors resort to tactics that impact our customer base and profitability, we must not suppress or obstruct their business because of jealousy.

An entrepreneur should cultivate him or herself first, then transmit compassion and the method for confronting suffering to family and employees, even to the entire society and country. Only such a person can find happiness. As with the saying, “First cultivate the self, next put one’s family in order, then govern the nation, and lastly bring peace to the whole world.”

*** DILIGENCE**

In Buddhism, diligence is to apply great effort to studying, practicing the Dharma, and doing virtuous deeds.

Diligence is the driving force of an enterprise; with diligence, the enterprise will grow.

An enterprise will encounter difficulties over the long run if it is only motivated by profit; if it is driven by compassion, everyone will love his or her own work.

Man’s pursuits are likened to the pyramid. Most people occupy the bottom of the pyramid and chase after material



goods and basic livelihood. Further up are those who have satisfied their fundamental needs and seek things beyond material pursuits such as music, art, philosophy, and religion. Only the very few at the top of the pyramid are blessed with an opportunity to unlock the secret behind the profound union of wisdom and compassion expounded in Buddhism.

Our values in life should mature with time and cannot be limited to seeking wealth alone. When we are more mature and able to open our hearts to embrace the world, we will gladly learn to give unconditionally to others. As long as it can benefit other beings, we will commit ourselves without hesitation, however difficult or stressful it might be. This is because of the great strength of compassion in our hearts.

It is common knowledge that those who do not care for their work are in it only for the money. However, when there is compassion, people will feel strongly about their work since it is their work that can help and benefit more people. With this passion, they will be diligent and will actively immerse themselves in work.

If the spirit of compassion is instilled in employees at every level, an enterprise will progress. Concurrently, corporate values will also begin to change. This kind of enterprise will not only be able to offer better products, but also contribute substantially to society and continue to prosper.

✿ **MEDITATIVE CONCENTRATION**

The purpose of meditation is to purify our mind. In the face

of significant temptations in the material world today, our mind is easily distracted and unable to quiet down. Meditative concentration has thus become an important and necessary technique for calming the mind.

We should not think meditation is a practice for monastics only. Actually, meditation is an effective method for regulating the mind and alleviating stress. It can be practiced by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

Previously, we mentioned the last general manager of Toshiba Corporation had a daily practice of reciting the *Lotus Sutra* which helped him relax and put him at ease. To eliminate fatigue and stress, he would study the sutra, instead of relying on alcohol, dance, and other such activities. Indeed, in reciting the sutras, we automatically acquire the blessing of the buddhas and bodhisattvas; moreover, in placing our entire focus on the Dharma verses, which are profound and moving, we are able to relax as well. However, to recite sutras, there needs to be faith in the Dharma; without this faith, there will be no intention to read and hence no positive result to be gained.

Meditation is different since it is not confined to any faith. Any person who is under great stress and suffers from insomnia or emotional outbursts — whether a corporate executive, entertainer, or ordinary employee — can alleviate the painful conditions and attain peace of mind by devoting roughly an hour in the morning and evening every day to meditation. In so doing, one can sleep better, regulate the mind, and eliminate afflictions. For this very reason, we should study Ch'an and practice meditative concentration. In the absence of this kind of spiritual support, stress can build up and get out of hand.



I believe many Buddhist concepts and methods for regulating the mind are useful to people in the modern world. As long as we are open to these concepts and methods, we will benefit from them. In the past when material goods were in short supply, spiritual problems were less of a concern; today with material goods in abundance, problems at the spiritual level have come to the surface. The Buddhist methods appear to be all the more indispensable at this time.

The specific meditation techniques have already been introduced in previous chapters.

WISDOM

The real core of Buddhism is wisdom. The main difference between Buddhism and other religions or branches of study — or one might say where it truly stands out — is wisdom.

The Middle Way

Whether it's running a business or managing it, we must stay the middle course and avoid the extremes. For example, if the management system of an enterprise is too harsh, the employees will not be able to endure the hardship; this may lead to suicides or circumstances beyond the company's control. On the other hand, if the management system of an enterprise is too lax, the employees will become negligent and disregard the rules; this may obstruct the company's growth.

Distinguishing Good from Evil

A business manager has to distinguish between good and evil, and know clearly what type of business is right or wrong. Any undertaking which inflicts harm on society, mankind, or living things is evil and must be avoided; any undertaking which is helpful to society, mankind, or living things is good and should be taken up. It is not enough to be smart; one must have wisdom to discern the difference. With intelligence, we only learn how to make money; with wisdom, we learn to do the right thing.

The Correct View of Money

In an earlier discussion, it was mentioned that money in itself is not a bad thing, nor is it all powerful. We need to know how to make use of money so as not to become rich but heartless.

In the first place, happiness is not entirely dependent on money. When income exceeds a certain point, it is merely a statistic in our bank account and is no longer related to our sense of happiness. Hence, we should not delude ourselves in thinking we will find happiness as soon as we become rich. This misunderstanding comes from not having a correct view of money. If we have unrealistic expectations of money, we will one day be deeply disappointed.

A survey was once taken in the United States: the participants — comprised of the four hundred richest persons in America and one thousand other people, among them the poor and low income group — were asked to rank their well-



being on a scale of 1 to 7 (1 denoting “very unhappy” and 7 denoting “very happy”). According to the results, the average happiness index of the very rich was 5.8.

The average happiness index of the Inuit people in Greenland, where the weather is bitter cold year round, was also 5.8. Even more surprising, the Masai nomads in Kenya, who live in squalor and in grass huts without electricity or water, had a happiness index of 5.8 as well.

Therefore, let us not place all our hopes on money.

There is a book written by the chief executive of a well-known U.S. multinational corporation. He had a very successful career which took a lifetime to build. In the end, he discovered he was stricken with cancer and had only three months to live. During that period, he quickly put all his corporate duties in order, took time to experience what it is like to truly live, and communicated that experience by writing it down. In the book, he said it was only in the last three months of his life that he felt he truly lived. Until then, he never had time to spend with his family or relax; to advance in his career, he worked overtime every day and never once felt completely at ease.

This is such a tragedy! Why should we have to wait till the end to experience the genuine meaning of life, to let go of unnecessary worries, and to have more time to spend with our family and friends?

We must be very clear about what we want. Is it money or happiness? It is difficult to have both. Even if we are blessed and have the ability to make money, there is no guarantee we can live as we wish. One can imagine, without a certain level of spiritual accomplishment, how difficult it is to maintain inner



peace in the face of endless demands and pressure at work. As ordinary people, we usually have but one choice.

No-Self

In Buddhism, the concept of no-self is a very profound one. The essence of no-self in Buddhism is best captured in the *Heart Sutra*: “Form does not differ from void, void does not differ from form; form is thus void, void is thus form.” The word “form” refers to matter, which is all illusory and empty. This is as in the film *Matrix* where the world is described as a computer system. When the system falls apart, the entire world disintegrates. The sutras tell us the world is merely an illusion; all things lack inherent existence, including the self and all that we possess.

However, we do not necessarily have to comprehend this concept now; for most of us, no-self means to forget oneself. Although we cannot be completely selfless at the start, we should be able to do our utmost to think less of ourselves and our own interests, and more of others.

Someday when we are able to give unstintingly of ourselves — that is, when we can give to the enterprise and, by way of the enterprise, to society and mankind, it is Buddhism in action.

