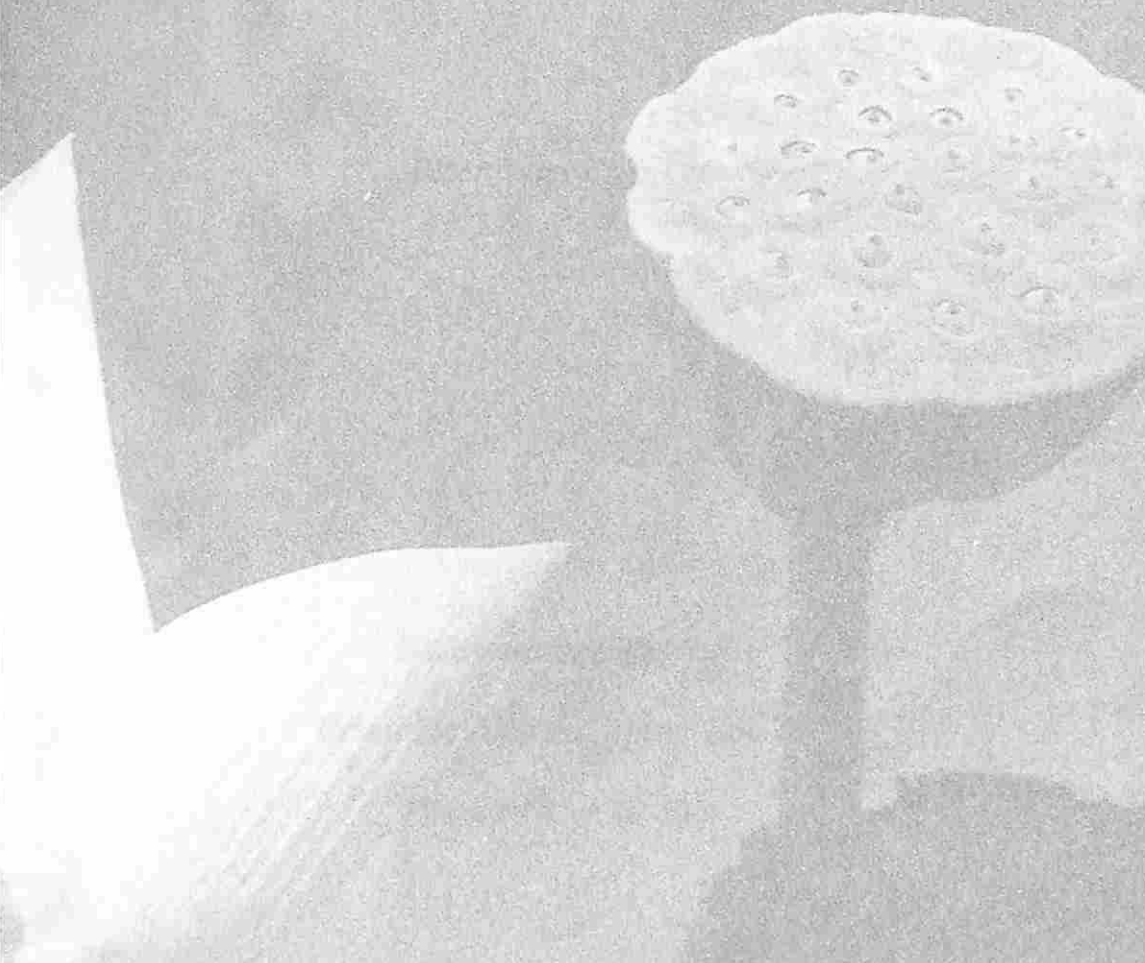


THE **DIRECT APPROACH**
TO **BUDDHADHARMA**

AN **EXHORTATION** TO BE
ALERT TO **THE DHARMA**







THE DIRECT APPROACH TO BUDDHADHARMA

by
Elder Yuan Chin Lee

Translated Into English
by
Venerable Dharma Master Lok To

Edited by K'un Li, Shih

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Dharma Master Lok To, Director
2611 Davidson Ave.
Bronx, New York 10648 (USA)
Tel. (718) 584-0621

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11F., 55 Hang Chow South Road Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C.

Tel: 886-2-23951198 , Fax: 886-2-23913415

Email: overseas@budaedu.org.tw

Website: <http://www.budaedu.org.tw>

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severed. Due to Right Faith all superstition can be cast away, by means of Right Action all unwholesome or evil acts are defeated and, eventually, through perfect enlightenment all delusion is dispelled. Buddhadharmā accommodates all other religious and philosophical doctrines and encourages the development of varied approaches to benefit all sentient beings. Kindly bear with me while I explain.

According to Buddhadharmā, especially as developed along the Mahayana tradition, its adherents' lives are active and free from constraints other than those accepted willingly. Human life is perceived neither as superior nor inferior, but as equal to the rest of the universe. We must understand that in Buddhist thought all that exists is endowed with the same greatness, the tiniest mote of dust included. The cyclic pattern of births and deaths generates perpetual change in the incessant flux of contiguous mind-moments. Birth and death are discerned because one generates the other and the same applies to all opposites. To apply a current term, we call it the "stream of life". A person, an object, a mote of dust, the entire universe, all that exists is engulfed in that flow which has no beginning and no end: That is reality. Each present moment is the convergence of past causes and present conditions; it is the root cause for the following moment or, in other words, the future. Cause and effect follow each other the way they always did and always will. Neither the beginning nor the end can be traced. All that exists is thus interrelated or intertwined and in each new moment all arises conjointly. Understood in such manner the entire universe arises with each rising mote of dust. Neither has a beginning nor end; both are devoid of a center and a boundary. Therefore we speak of the phenomena as rising all at once (since all being is intertwined), and the forms we perceive as permanent all are fictitious and contrived.

Whoever attempts to trace the line from son to father, to grandfather to great-grandfather and so on, will soon realize

scientists on just about all the fundamental issues. Perfect peace, it would appear, can only be obtained through one's own intuitive understanding. Only then can one be wide awake, clear-headed and joyful, smiling brightly.

In the text which follows, Elder Yuen Ching Lee presents existence as the product of causes and conditions. What is a cause, and what is a condition? Let us consider, for example, a seed: If we merely place it on the table and pray to it, reciting "seed, seed, tree, tree," the seed is not going to turn into a tree no matter how long we recite to it. Why? Because the seed is only a cause or a potential and requires certain conditions for its potential to bring results. What are the conditions requisite for its development? That soil, air, water, light, and time are all indispensable; furthermore, each of these must be in the appropriate quantity for the seed to become a tree. Let us consider another example: The materials used for the construction of a house are the causes. They require certain conditions such as a plan, a piece of land, a workman and his tools, if they are to produce jointly a house. Only when the requisite causes and conditions converge can the house materialize. Furthermore, within any given cause and condition there are further causes and conditions. In the example of the house, the bricks have brick-causes and conditions and beams have beam-causes and conditions; the same applies to the tools, windows, the doors, the nails, and so on.

By analogy, people have their causes and conditions and so do animals, plants and all the rest: Mountains have mountain-causes and conditions, oceans have ocean-causes and conditions; there are family-causes and conditions, nation-causes and conditions, and world-causes and conditions. There are also the universe-causes and conditions. No part of existence has been created by a supernatural being. All that exists is and has always been, the outcome of causes and conditions. When this is understood, mind is freed from doubt and delusion and

brightens and expands as the result of it.

Now that we understand how causes and conditions are jointly at the root of all existence we are able to understand the doctrine of cause and effect. It is easy to see that no part of all that exists can be viewed as separate. However, numerous distant causes are concealed and therefore rather difficult to discern. The proximate causes are always evident, but the more remote ones are not. Causes and effects manifesting as forms are self-evident, but those related to the formless plane tend to be elusive. Some causes and effects have shallow roots, while others are deep-rooted. Evil or good, the causes and their effects follow one another in the same way a shadow follows the foot. Thus it becomes obvious that one reaps as one has sown. When we plant an apple-seed, we should not expect to harvest peaches and, by the same token, good causes produce good effects and evil causes evil ones. Evil generated by people is in proportion to how well they understand this foolproof doctrine.

The doctrine of rebirth is yet another essential part of Buddhadharma. People in Asia are completely familiar with it, but those in the western world have discovered it relatively recently. The doctrine of rebirth is completely consistent with the teaching of cause and effect, and the present commentary deals with causes and their effects and how these influence one's rebirth by means of karma. Supramundane causes yield supramundane results, and the practice of ten virtues is a cause that will have rebirth in heaven for a result. When the ten evil causes are present, rebirth in hell automatically follows. Most of us neither have the virtue requisite for a rebirth in the heavenly realm, nor the evil necessary for rebirth in hell, and therefore we have to endure this world countless times over, reborn according to the karma we have accumulated so far; the retribution we receive is exactly proportionate to it. There is no supreme being rewarding or punishing us. Merely one's own karma, good or bad, is taking its course in the form of result or

effect.

The doctrine of rebirth as understood by Buddhists does not automatically imply that one will be reborn as a human being. There are, according to Buddhadharmā, six kinds of beings and their six respective realms in the wheel of existence. Retribution takes the form of rebirth in any one of these realms, and is determined by one's karmic causes. What beings inhabit these six realms? The first realm is the heavenly one, consisting of twenty-eight varieties of heavens and is inhabited by devas. The second one is that of human beings, and it includes all people living in this world at present. The third one belongs to the asuras, characterized by jealousy and envy. These three realms are considered fortunate. The animal realm, the fourth of the six, is a realm characterized by ignorance and confusion. The denizens of the fifth realm are characterized by insatiable craving and miserliness, and the sixth contains the hell realms; there, the hell dwellers must endure undescrivable suffering. These last three are termed woeful. One's rebirth in any of these six realms is determined solely by one's karmic causes accumulated in one's lives up to the present.

Closely related to the doctrine of rebirth in the six realms is the important matter of abstention from taking life. I have met many people who are afraid to face this matter and yet, as long as we shun this issue, we remain confused. In each of our countless lives we had parents. Where are they now? We know that people are sentient beings, and furthermore, that the mind of sentient beings changes constantly. Their actions follow the same pattern and, amidst all that change, the many varied thoughts and actions result in wide range of retribution. Since our subsequent rebirths depend on present causes, we can safely assume that our parents are, likewise, still in the samsara or cyclic existence. But where, and in what form, we have no way of knowing; the same is true regarding friends and relatives

from previous existences. When we participate in taking lives in the present, eating the flesh of living beings, it may be that we are consuming someone who was very close to us in one of our previous existences. When we consider this point carefully, can we still go on participating mercilessly in the continuous taking of lives? The Buddha advised us to establish this mind and this contemplation when eating meat. I would like to introduce countless friends to Buddhadharma in order to help them leave the wheel of life.

Elder Yuan Chin Lee's lucid commentary explains the Four Noble Truths, the Twelve Links in the Chain of Existence and the six kinds of Perfection. In addition, he makes available to us the guidelines for study and practice of the Buddha's teaching, thereby enabling us to transcend this world, the cycle of birth and death and the three woeful realms, and to attain complete enlightenment. Elder Yuan Chin Lee emphasizes the approach promulgated by the Pure Land sect, because in his view it is the most expedient, leading to rebirth in Pure Land. He explains it clearly enough in the following commentary and there is no need for me to expand on his topic any further.

Dharma Master Lok To

New York, 1994

On Zen and Pure Land
(from *Awakening of the Faith Treatise*)

Suppose there is a man who learns this [Mahayana] teaching [of meditation] for the first time and wishes to seek the correct faith but lacks courage and strength. Because he lives in this world of suffering, he fears that he will not always be able to meet the Buddhas and honor them personally, and that faith being difficult to perfect, he will be inclined to fall back.

He should know that the Tathagathas have an excellent expedient means by which they can protect his faith: that is, through the strength of wholehearted meditation-recitation on the Buddha [Amitabha], he will in fulfillment of his wishes be able to be born in the Buddha-land beyond, to see the Buddha always, and to be forever separated from the evil states of existence.

[If a cultivator follows this path], he will be able to be born there in the end because he abides in the correct samadhi.

/ S. Yoshito Hakeda, tr., p. 102. /

DIRECT APPROACH TO BUDDHADHARMA

Elder Yuan Chin Lee

Preface

Perusal through the history of Buddhism since its beginning two thousand five hundred years ago reveals the significance of the Buddha's Teaching; translated into more than thirty languages it has influenced most of the nations and cultures worldwide. The textual foundation of Buddhism known as the Tripitaka consists of three parts, namely, the sutras, the rules of discipline or Vinaya, and the commentaries or sastras. Teaching contained in the Tripitaka is profound, subtle and extensive; the texts are quite voluminous and make the Tripitaka elude description. Buddhism has attracted scholarly interest in the areas of philosophy, religion, psychology and history, to name only a few, and continuing interest in Buddhism throughout the world has generated numerous publications internationally; its relevance to education at all levels is demonstrated by the on-going effort on the part of countless educators to implement its principles in their field of expertise. Buddhism is considered a religion by some, while others feel it is a philosophy. Whose view is correct?

Buddhadharma is the unsurpassed means to liberation from delusion and attachment. The Buddha's teaching is the Truth, pure and simple, focussed on reality as oneness or Suchness. Dharma represents both the substance and function. Delusory thought does not reveal reality, nor is attachment conducive to Suchness. Most thought-systems available to us are contaminated by personal preferences and subjective views and cannot be applied universally for those reasons. Buddhism, by contrast, has a fully awakened mind for its source, as the term

"Buddha" suggests. Since Shakyamuni Buddha's unsurpassed awakening more than two thousand five hundred years ago, his teaching, based on his realization of the most profound kind, has illuminated countless universes and has provided all without exception with an occasion to perceive one's own original face and to realize the essential truth of existence. Although great many accomplished thinkers have formulated a world view that is both brilliant and valid, none could withstand comparison with the Buddha's teachings in terms of their universal applicability and clarity. But the Buddhadharma is at its most powerful when directed toward the improvement of understanding and action on the part of those who study and practice it seriously.

Two such parallels can be established between Buddhadharma and the system of principles, practices and procedures as applied in scientific research today: A sustained avoidance of thought devoid of substance and expanding the field of experimentation when the results or evidence have been inconclusive. Central to all Buddhist practice are the three studies, namely, self-discipline, concentration of mind, and wisdom generated by intuitive insight.

Furthermore, every insight without exception should be evidenced by direct experience which, in turn, qualitatively improves through application of the three studies. The sciences are operative within an objective framework, while the Buddha's teaching is at its most efficacious in the context of subjective practice.

Whoever feels that Buddhism is a religion should examine carefully the features which distinguish it from the theistic religious traditions. The Buddha advised to rely solely on the four following points:

- 1) Depend on the teaching, not on men;
- 2) Depend on the meaning, not on words;

- 3) Trust wisdom rather than consciousness;
- 4) Study texts containing complete rather than partial revelation.

Although the historical Buddha is widely respected as the most exceptional human being that ever graced this world, according to his own Teaching he is, nevertheless, equated with the mind and with sentient beings. The concept of an "other" power, an "undefinable absolute", a "supreme being" or "God" as the creator and the law-giver whom all must fear, obey and supplicate is absent from Buddhist thought. That is the first difference.

It is customary in other religious traditions to rely on scriptural foundation consisting of eternally valid rules, commands, admonitions and comments which are to be accepted and obeyed. By contrast, the just mentioned four points recommended by the Buddha open the whole of his teaching to exploration and discovery, without losing any of its depth or subtlety. The truth promulgated by Buddhadharma can be evidenced by anyone interested and though it is open to discussion, it has become widely accepted as rooted in common sense. There does not appear to be any need for debate, just as in geometry the theorem "right angle equals ninety degrees" though not sacred, is not debated either. This is the second difference to bear in mind when comparing Buddhadharma with theistic traditions.

Theistic religious doctrines invariably contain some dogmas which, though not understood by the faithful, must nevertheless be unquestioningly accepted by them. The Buddha's teaching, on the other hand, is rational and his intent is out in the open. His goal is the enlightenment of all sentient beings. All of the Buddha's teachings are merely expedient means to that end. Initially, everyone has the great Bodhi-mind, but defilements and obstacles impede its radiance and whoever wishes to retrieve it must seek true wisdom through the

practice of meditation which, in turn, requires self-discipline. Meditation is the expedient conducive to wisdom, self-discipline is conducive to meditation. This approach typifies a broad and open mind completely free from dependence on external factors. This is the third difference.

Religious systems, Buddhism excepted, exercise control over their adherents, eliciting their obedience as a token of their faith. Buddhadharma, on the other hand, invites a reasonable approach to its teachings, its practice and its goals. In order to have a clear understanding of the truth, one must develop one's capacity to apply one's own wisdom and no one and no thing can do it in one's stead. In most religious traditions, the faithful are held in check by a system of rewards and punishments, while Buddhism, by contrast, fosters rational understanding on the part of its practitioners of the advantages benefiting one's own self as well as all the others through the practice of voluntary self-discipline. Where other religions worship one or several supreme powers or beings that are completely beyond reach of their followers, Buddhadharma recognizes wisdom and Self-nature as qualities possessed by all, thereby empowering all human beings to attain the great awakening. Such faith in one's own self, such self-respect imply a full recognition and acceptance of one's own mind and one's own Self-nature as pristine and perfect. Faith of that kind is superbly all-inclusive. It would appear that where other religious systems coerce the devotees through the power of authority, Buddhism promotes in its practitioners self-reliance and self-respect. That is the fourth difference.

Due to these fundamental differences, one cannot draw parallels between Buddhism and other religions in any meaningful way. at the face of it, Buddhadharma is the only comprehensive thought-system which offers clear and complete interpretation of one's own existence within a universal context. By means of Right Understanding all wrong views are

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Although a panoramic view of world religions reveals their great diversity, two features all religions share make them resemble each other: Each tries to guide its adherents to the greatest "good" and to divert them away from what is perceived as "evil" according to their respective traditions.

What we believe or have faith in depends on what we know and how deep our understanding is; our choice is determined by what we deem reasonable. Genuine, deep faith is invariably rooted in one's true understanding rather than being the outcome of tradition, feelings or attitudes. It is never rooted in superstition of any kind. Genuine faith is always accompanied by a deep understanding. Since all of us can be said to possess a certain amount of innate wisdom as well as the ability to understand the meaning of truth, we are well advised to adopt a religious tradition in accordance with our propensities in order to develop our spiritual potential the same way students study those subjects which maximize theirs. The quest for truth can lead us to most profound understanding accessible to humanity.

These thoughts reflect the considered views of Elder Yuan Ching Lee who studied religions for many years and eventually settled for the direct approach of Buddhadharma. He kept a written record of his experiences, insights and comments for future reference and for the purpose of sharing them with those interested in the quest for truth. His observations are astute and rational. His approach to the subject of religion is as open as if it were any other subject, such as philosophy, literature or any other of the humanities.

A view based on the findings of modern science, attractive as it may seem, is inconclusive partly because modern science is a field of human knowledge which expands rapidly and also because there are disagreements among reputable

that the very first father is nowhere to be found. Similarly, all the components of one's personality, such as the four elements, one's physiology, one's psychological makeup, even one's kin, one's education and cultivation all are impossible to trace. If, for one moment, you consider your breath, you are bound to realize by means of own experience your own connectedness with the entire universe; there is no way to determine who or what is in the center, on the inside or outside. One represents all and all represent the one.

It would not be far-fetched to say that the purpose and the end of the universe is one's own self. Furthermore, it makes good sense to say that one is the creator of one's own universe, as well as its center and law-giver. This is the Dharmadhatu according to Buddhadharmā. Dharmadhatu or Dharma-sphere is devoid of personality and ego. The human existence, just like the universe, is dynamic, unencumbered, without center and boundary, without beginning and without end. Perfect balance exists between the two. It is not an exaggeration to say one stirs the Pacific Ocean using one finger and with one breath one stirs the air in the entire world. One's finger is very small, but it has two sides, and therefore the ocean is affected. The movement is so subtle it is not perceptible by one's eyesight; the same can be said about one's breath. History provides many examples of the very real strength or impact of a particular human being on subsequent generations in terms of karmic force. In the more or less distant past, there lived occasionally some truly great individuals endowed with exceptional wisdom, and their influence on mankind is noticeable to this day. Their wisdom is reflected in all that exists, thereby confirming that all of us are inextricably interrelated one with another, as well as with the rest of the universe.

We find ourselves in a universe without a beginning and without end; all we need is a complete understanding that

there is nothing to crave, nothing to cling to. Then the mind can reach its full potential, expand and meet the universe on equal terms by becoming boundless, immeasurable. At such time we are able to understand our life as birthless and deathless, and perceive clearly the radiance of the path to the supreme Bodhi and to enlightenment.

It is most unfortunate that the uninformed majority have not developed yet their capacities to understand this doctrine. Their idea of "self" is based on assumptions unverifiable by experience, restricted in terms of space along the horizontal line while along the vertical line such thinking is restricted by time. Although the self as understood by the uninformed is a delusion, it is vigorously protected against the "others", held to incessantly jeopardize the "I". Such an attitude is at the origin of countless conflicts. All discriminatory views which ultimately lead to confrontations result from the root delusion as regards the self. The worst possible scenario we can think of is not, as some might imagine, some natural disaster or shortage of food, but an on-going violent confrontation between people divided by irreconcilable views (whatever they may be), which both sides tenaciously hold on to. People destroying people or "the others", for their own benefit is about as low as mankind can sink.

People's reaction to life and its vicissitudes tends to be melancholy and the escape routes they devise frequently prove inadequate, with the result that many people today feel continually despondent and some even take their own life. Self-indulgence appears to be the most popular and the most deceptive way people deal with problems. Food, drink, sex, entertainment and consumerism are the perennial remedies often applied to excess; more often than not people bring about their own ruin not only financially, but in terms of their health and their character as well. The media cannot be relied upon for support because they thrive on bad news and we receive a

fresh supply of it daily. The most reliable means to counter these states resulting from alienation is to understand, first of all, the causes and conditions underlying our relationships with others, and to refrain from making sharp distinctions between oneself and others. It is healing to realize as often as possible the essentially interactive character of all existence in this universe.

The distinctive mark of wisdom is to choose actions benefiting others, because that is where our own benefit is to be found. In the final analysis, when we hurt others we are hurting ourselves. We can resolve many difficult situations by means of a simple reminder that whatever happiness or grief we presently experience is the result of past causes and our present actions are the foundations of future results or effects. We interact with the world, it cannot be avoided, and therefore we need to be mindful of the effect our actions have on others. The sooner we all understand this, the closer we get to the peaceful, happy world we all long for.

At this point we all, hopefully, understand that life as such has no beginning and no end, and the forms we tend to consider real are actually not so. Yet most of us cultivate the view that one such false form is a more or less independent entity demarcated by birth and death, around which life structures itself. Only when it has been singled out as one complete sequence and designated as life of a person, does it become one of the countless manifestations in the stream of life. In reality, there is no birth that precedes duration and death. There is nothing there which begins, nothing that dies. There are only moments following one another, the preceding one being the cause of the one which follows; each moment, though unique, is causally connected with the preceding one and with the one which immediately follows. The only reality, as far as mind is concerned, is change, and change, and change, without end. We speak of birth and death because we get

caught up in the wheel of existence. Because our mind gets caught up in circumstances, there is birth and death, and when circumstances are favorable there is happiness, attachment and clinging; circumstances being unfavorable, there is aversion, hate and anger. We almost never perceive a given situation as a fabrication produced entirely by our own thoughts and feelings. On the contrary, we consider all of it real, and react to a given situation with clinging or with anger; in both cases we sink deeper into ignorance. Due to our conceptualizing of what we experience, we react to circumstances by give rise to greed, hatred and ignorance countless times. Each thought forms a new fetter and reinforces the old ones, tying together body and mind and we keep on turning in the wheel of existence without respite. Our bodies follow our minds; if our minds do not relinquish delusion and abide in greed, hatred and ignorance, our bodies will follow our minds and suffer, endlessly repeating the cycle of birth and death. In this manner countless karmas are produced.

Modern understanding of evolution does not address its full breath. The only real evolution means liberation from suffering and from unwholesome karma. It means, furthermore, allowing one's mind to settle in the teachings, thereby fostering emancipation from dependence on circumstances. Shakyamuni attained the great liberation from the fetters of circumstance by means of his perfect, incomparable enlightenment. Out of great compassion he shared his findings with all sentient beings so they may, likewise, set themselves free. All of his teachings are directed toward this goal. Whoever has entered the path to Bodhi will be able to appreciate the perfume and the flavor of freedom by means of dharmas along the way. Buddhadharma answers our questions directly and exhaustively. One of its fundamental teachings emphasizes the importance of abandoning unwholesome or unskillful actions through our body, speech and mind, because only in such manner can we

abandon bad karma and progress on our path to liberation. As one rises from the status of sentient beings to buddhahood, one's wisdom and one's life gradually become boundless. The mind, freed from obstructions, feels comfortable and relaxed, and that is the principle of evolution.

Search for Truth has been in the forefront of human endeavor as far back in history as the available records allow as to go. What are the results? Modern science is effective in the realm of phenomena and intellect, working with the branches, not with the roots. Philosophers have proposed thought-systems such as monism, dualism, idealism, materialism, liberalism and determinism, to name only a few, and their ongoing debate has not yielded any plausible conclusion in the realm of metaphysics. Confucius, one of China's most influential thinkers, expounded on relationships between people in general and between society and its members in particular, but he did not address man's relationship to the absolute. These numerous concepts remain epistemological paradigms of little real value in terms of providing a method of dealing with the great matter of life and death.

Buddhadharma is the only source that provides a method together with the teaching. Why is it that no one, the Buddha excepted, could effectively address the problem? It is my personal view that the motivation of all those thinkers never really left this world: Their knowledge is the knowledge of the conditioned only, and as such bound by obstacles. In consequence, the arguments cannot be settled and a full understanding can not be reached in that manner. For full development of the mind, understanding the world of phenomena alone is not enough. The Bodhi, or the fully awakened mind, encompasses immeasurable spheres and countless universes. To attain that status, we must relinquish attachment and sophistry and eradicate the barrier of the known; only then can we get an unencumbered view. When

we have achieved that, our defilements will drop off by themselves. Dear friends, do not think for a moment these states of mind are remote from daily suffering, secluded as they appear to be in happy and unhappy states. We should understand that if we want to resolve the common varieties of suffering as well as the accompanying attachment to happiness, we must transcend both. Presently the question is, what is meant by "transcend"? Abandoning the usual types of suffering as well as one's attachment to happiness does not imply not caring. In the words of an ancient sage, "Buddhadharma is just plain, ordinary food. When we teach it, it is just plain talk about commitment."

If there is one feature that may be said to characterize all of the Buddha's teaching, it is boundless equanimity and a wholehearted commitment to guide all sentient beings to a speedy awakening. A mind of equanimity and a great vow both are rooted in harmony and their range is boundless. When combined, they are jointly called the great compassion. We understand a mote of dust is minute, and the world is immense. Our perception of the world usually places closest to us other people, some distance away are sentient beings, and all of them interface, interrelate and interact moment to moment in the flow of life that never ceases. Such is the meaning of equality in the Buddhist context. All sentient beings possess a mind which means they all have the capacity to change and attain enlightenment. The single thought and the mind's true nature are of the same substance as the Buddha, but although he attained enlightenment, we remain confused. There neither was an increase because of his enlightenment, nor is there a decrease because of our ignorance and confusion. These are values related to material. Due to his enlightenment, the Buddha was in complete harmony with nature, but we suffer greatly because of our conflict-ridden attitude due to ignorance. The Buddha's mind was exactly of the same substance, but he delighted in

Dharma, freed himself from all conditioning, applying his mind as boundless compassion and remembering all sentient beings moment by moment.

Sentient beings, on the other hand, use their mind for different purpose. Ignoring their mind which has the same substance and the same standing that of the Buddha, they choose the small form of their bodies, hold that form to be their true self and endure unspeakable suffering as a result of it. Because they seek the outward form, they end up empty handed. For countless kalpas, sentient beings have been searching outside their mind and have produced innumerable karmas because of ignorance. Because we are unenlightened, we assume that the causes of our suffering are not in our minds, but outside, perceiving ourselves as the victims of circumstances. As we gradually come to understand the motivation of all buddhas, knowing the defilement of ignorance is exceedingly heavy among sentient beings, we will be more inclined thereafter to generate continually a mind of equanimity. At the same time we should be able to discern clearly the essence of Mahayana Dharma.

Mahayana Dharma can be described as simultaneously empty and not empty. It is empty in the sense of being empty of ego, yet it cannot be considered empty because there is compassion. The practice of compassion is void when there is no ego-grasping, but it is not void because it can be perceived as existing. Compassion that is ego-motivated cannot be called compassion. True compassion is saturated with substance, grounded as it is on the understanding that sentient beings are not different from self, and there is no room left for ego-oriented concerns. Only when the substance is recognized as the common ground of all sentient beings, can true compassion be generated.

In the context of Buddhist thought, true compassion has three distinctive characteristics, i.e., it is void of self, void of

form and void of intent. The compassion arising from the condition of sentient beings, felt in every instance as inseparable from people, is of greatest benefit to the world. It is known as great compassion. Whoever has attained the great Void as understood in the context of teachings has abandoned ego-views and ego-clinging. Only in that state of mind can genuine acts of compassion be accomplished. At such time the actions offered for the benefit of sentient beings and for the salvation of the world truly are what they purport to be. Whoever attains that stage is free from attachment to his or her own body and mind, and therefore not capable nor tempted to neglect his/her duties, deceive others or misuse situations. Such a person abides in the great Void, his/her mind firmly established in the great vow to save the world and thereby benefit both self and others. The mind thus established provides the ideal frame for peaceful negotiations of any kind, and if statesmen and influential politicians would adopt this view and deal with the non-void while dwelling in the Void, they all would be bodhisattvas.

Buddhists who have the capacity to perceive both the Void and the non-void have found therein a firm footing for the cultivation of both. Through cultivation of the Void they eradicate the three poisons, being thereby released from the four forms and empowered to progress upwards to higher levels of insight while not abandoning the sentient beings to be saved.

The following is a dialogue between the Buddha and one of his disciples as retold in a Mahayana sutra. To the disciple's question regarding who ought to go to hell the World Honored One answered " I ought to go there; not only go there but stay there; not only stay there but be happy while there; not only be happy while there but become the adornment of hell." The one who has learned the Tao and generated the Bodhi-mind to the degree of being an adornment in hell has acquired an immeasurable strength of vow and

his/her natural power is inconceivable. The following eight excerpts are from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. They provide supreme guidance for all those who seriously study and practice Buddhadharmā:

1) A bodhisattva enters the teaching of equanimity by considering all sentient beings as own relatives and friends. When sentient being expresses unwholesome views in the presence of a bodhisattva, the bodhisattva remains untainted by anger and his/her attitude of equanimity remains unaffected; he/she maintains friendship towards all sentient beings, thereby improving their practice. A bodhisattva is like the great ocean that will not decay no matter how much pollutant is thrown in. The fools, the ignorant, those devoid of wisdom and kindness the selfish and the arrogant whose minds are impervious to Buddhadharmā cannot upset him/her.

2) A bodhisattva does not abandon the foolish and the unwholesome even if they are difficult to be with, difficult to guide and have never helped another being. At such time the bodhisattva expediently applies the great Vow, wearing it as his/her adornment and as an armor to protect all sentient beings without exception, never considering abandoning the burden. He/she retains his/her determination when faced with ingratitude and insensitivity both of which are common among sentient beings. Bodhisattvas do not dwell on the faults of others, nor do they give rise to dislike; not for one moment do they consider returning to the status of worldlings.

3) A Bodhisattva Mahasattva, when perceiving unwholesome actions of sentient beings, realizes they produce bad karmas which automatically result in suffering. He/she resolves to take on their suffering in their place. The bodhisattva remains dedicated to the progress of sentient beings on their spiritual path and never fails to carry out a promise or commitment; he/she does not backslide and does not yield to resentment or fatigue while fulfilling his/her great vow.

4) A bodhisattva takes upon himself or herself the suffering of sentient beings rather than watch them suffer and be defeated. He/she always keeps in mind what is in their best interest and accepts falling in hell, being taken hostage in dangerous situations or sitting by Maya's side in the animal-hells just to deliver sentient beings from evil.

5) A bodhisattva observes and then reflects on his/her observations as follows: The people in this world, greedy as they are, endure immeasurable suffering in order to satisfy merely a small portion of their desires. Therefore I never give up quest for the supreme Bodhi, not confusing it with the five desires, but always staying with the bodhisattva action. To save all sentient beings I set them free through practice of the great vow in its completeness, breaking of all fetters.

6) A bodhisattva practicing the virtues of bodhisattvas keeps in mind those who cannot save themselves and wonders how to save them. Starting with himself or herself, the bodhisattva makes the great vow, develops good roots and transfers the merit to others. This is called converting, illuminating and directing all sentient beings. As he/she protects and saves them, the bodhisattva helps them to overcome doubt and joyfully attain final deliverance.

7) A bodhisattva illuminates all without exception but never looks for reward, and in this respect he/she is just like the sun in the sky. When sentient beings fall into unwholesome, unskillful ways, the bodhisattva forbears, never abandoning his/her vow. Fastidiously avoiding unwholesome actions through body, speech and mind, he/she obtains happiness for all by means of his/her practice of virtues.

8) A bodhisattva shelters sentient beings from numerous forms of suffering. He/she is like a peaceful community into which sentient beings retire to find seclusion from defilements, from fear and from stress. A bodhisattva is like a garden where sentient beings enter for wisdom and safety. He/she is like a

bright light which swallows the darkness of ignorance. A bodhisattva is like a pool that soothes as it cools, purifying all without exception. He/she is a teacher and a guide on the enlightening path to wisdom.

The eight excerpts from the *Avatamsaka Sutra* we have just quoted express the spirit of Mahayana at its clearest. Based on these, how can anyone hold the Buddha's teaching as pessimistic and how can anyone say Buddhadharma is negative?

TEACHING REGARDING THE WORLDLY

For the purpose of an overview, teachings contained in Buddhadharma can be conveniently divided into two paths, i.e., the mundane Dharma, also known as the "Teaching Regarding the Worldly"; and the Dharma of the Supramundane, also called the "Ultimate Path". Dharma of the Ultimate Path is the essential constituent in each of the three major traditions of Buddhism practiced today, namely Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. We are going to study Buddhadharma by first turning our attention to the Mundane Dharma or the Teaching regarding the worldly.

Our connection with the world is most intimate although the fact usually escapes our attention because we take it for granted; we re-confirm it with each breath we take and every action we perform and there is no way we can control it. This connection continues after we die and therefore we keep turning on the wheel of birth and death. The only way to liberation from this fetter is to discern the true reality of our lives. Addressed exhaustively, this process of discerning will lead to liberation. According to Buddhadharma, the first step is to become fully aware of the world.

Questions regarding the origin and the purpose of the universe and how is it regulated have preoccupied people as far back in history as evidence can take us. The scope of the

universe in terms of space and time exceeds our capacity for understanding. The earth's volume makes us insignificant by comparison, and all our attempts to control time and space are equally frustrating; their boundaries keep evading us. The riddle of the universe daunts philosophers and scientists alike. In theistic systems the answer to the riddle is invariably relegated to the uppermost echelons of divine power and worldlings advised to regard these mysteries beyond their scope of thinking.

Answers to questions regarding the universe offered by Buddhadharmas have been recognized on countless occasions as the most plausible; they are being considered seriously by an ever increasing number of scientists. The universe as posited by Buddhist metaphysics is powered by and depends on the dynamics of karma. The earth's enormous body and its life consist entirely of a network woven by the dynamics of karma. What do we mean by the word "karma"? According to the *Abhidharma Kosa*, "to institute an action is karma". In more detail, every action through the body, speech and mind is manifesting the dynamics of karma. The karmic momentum is referred to as "karmic force".

Starting from the moment a human being is born into this world he/she enters a round of diverse circumstances beyond his/her control. Favorable to a greater or lesser degree, they are all a manifestation of karmic force. The functioning of karmic energy, when understood in terms of a non-spacial continuum or time as an apparently irreversible succession of events spanning the past through the present to the future, is known as "cause and effect". All that exists is totally controlled by and dependent on cause and effect for its continuation or demise. Birth and death of a human being, the length of his/her life, his/her prosperity or the lack of it as well as all the countless events he/she encounters during his/her life are the evidence of cause and effect. Flourishing and disintegration of

cities or the establishing and dissolution of countries never happen haphazardly.

The formula of cause and effect can be compared to the simplest mathematical equation. Given such and such a cause, such and such an effect is inevitable. The immediate causes and effects are clearer and therefore easier to see, while the distant ones are concealed, hence difficult to discern. A given effect, though anticipated, may not materialize because additional causes influence the outcome. Complex causes should be expected to produce complex effects.

As a matter of fact, all that exists ought to be perceived as a complex, constantly changing process that corresponds to the intricate functioning of the human mind. The ways in which karmic effects are consistent with their karmic causes vary in complexity and therefore the retribution also changes in the course of time. For that reason conditions of sentient beings in the six realms on the wheel of existence vary so much. There are those who encounter blessings in the midst of calamity or vice versa. A good person may give rise to an unwholesome thought while an evil person may entertain a wholesome one. The overall tendency of a predominantly unwholesome karma may conceal numerous good actions. By contrast, a great plan for the benefit of all may contain some not immediately perceptible evil or unwholesome features. It may occur that a person born into the heavenly realm on the wheel of existence prior to having completed retribution for some bad karma will have to do so after his/her good karma has been exhausted; at that time his/her rebirth may occur in a much lower realm. The one born in hell, on the other hand, will have his/her chances for better rebirth improved by formerly accumulated good karma, activated once his/her retribution has been exhausted. Another example is that of a person whose present karma is good but there is retribution to be endured due to unwholesome circumstances at the time of

his/her death; that will come first, while his/her present karma is ripening.

The rice we eat comes from last year's seed and failing to plant this year there will be no seed in the year to come. This explanation is as clear as can be, because the three-fold karmic action of body, speech and mind likewise continually produces good and bad seeds moment by moment, day by day. Some of the effects will occur while an action is in progress and others, after the fact. How soon after will retribution follow and for how long is determined by the karmic causes alone. Since these change moment to moment, their effect in the form of retribution has to change correspondingly with them. There are three kinds of retribution according to the length and timing of its occurrence. One kind is operative in the present, one in the life immediately following, and one kind of retribution will manifest after an interval of undetermined length. It may be positive or negative, i.e. blessings or trouble. Though this doctrine may appear complicated on the face of it, the causes within causes, effects within effects never fail. In the same way a creditor never forgets to collect, retribution is sure to follow each action.

One reaps exactly as one has sown; it is as simple as that. This doctrine contrasts with the concept of fate or destiny, or God's will. These concepts contain unexplainable inconsistencies. Why some live in luxury and others must starve, and why must some newborn babies die before they had a chance to commit good or evil? Some are born into disastrous circumstances while others arrive into nurturing conditions. If such things happen, as some believe, as a punishment for the parents' mistakes, how can it be explained that some children of very evil people live happy lives? There is, indeed, a lot about human life that seems unfair and therefore difficult to accept. The doctrine of cause and effect is the only explanation that is rational, plausible and fair. Most importantly, it discloses

the mind as the creator of karma, thereby introducing the possibility of change. One can choose to turn it around as the life-stream flows on.

The following example is an illustration of how the karmic force works. A gentleman named Yuan Liao Fan once had a horoscope cast by a gentleman called Kung, an astrologer. The horoscope predicted that Yuan Liao Fan would receive fourteen points in national examination, seventy-one points in a state examination, and nine points in college examination. He was to become a scholar in such and such a year, and appointed to the office of governor on such and such a date. He was to die childless at the age of fifty-three. The events unfolded exactly as predicted until the time Yuan Liao Fan became the governor, causing him to experience great disappointment. Every event in this life is predetermined, he thought, wondering where, in that case, his accomplishment was and if he had any. At that time he made the acquaintance of Ch'an master Yun Ku of Hsi Hsia mountain who introduced him to Buddhadharma. By those means Yuan Liao Fan learned to be satisfied with his lot and concentrate on generating good karma. He was attracted to activities benefitting others to such a degree he eventually left his post and his prominent position in society in order to dedicate himself fully to the welfare of others. By changing the direction of his karma his life deviated from his horoscope forecast.

The prediction was proven incorrect on three points. The gentleman holds presently a position higher than that of the governor; he has a son; and although he was to die at the age of fifty-three, he is sixty-three, alive and well. The astrological chart did not prove to be correct, however, we do not know the true bondage of karma force in his case. His case helps us to realize that fools can become wise and vice versa. All of us can bring about change in our lives and make it shorter or longer; more or less lucky; more or less rich in spite of it being

said that heaven controls everything. If it does, it is because people have decided so. Very few of us realize that karma is created by the mind and therefore it can be changed by the same means. To understand that one is in control of own destiny empowers one to foster the right attitude grounded in self-discipline while endeavoring to obtain blessings for oneself.

One point we have discussed briefly deserves additional comment. It regards the causes or seeds of karma which, though planted, have not matured in order to take effect. The question is, where does their karmic energy abide? If we wish to understand this point we must look at the eight kinds of consciousness. According to Buddhadharma all that exists is produced by the mind, meaning one's own consciousness. This is not difficult to understand. Let us consider for a moment the way in which we edit what we experience. Although we are surrounded by countless manifestations of matter we notice only those touched by our consciousness. As for all the rest, although we look we do not see; although we hear we do not listen.

Our consciousness, according to the Teachings, consists of eight components, namely the five senses; the mind-consciousness; the Manah-consciousness; and the Alaya-consciousness. The five senses and the mind-consciousness correspond to five organs, i.e. eye; ear; tongue; nose; body; as well as the brain. Every mind-contact or piece of information results in guna or dust, resulting in form; sound; smell; taste; touch; idea. Each of sense corresponds to its specific kind of consciousness within its specialized field and is not interchangeable with any of the other kinds; its task is to know. The mind-consciousness has the capacity to rise simultaneously with any one of the seven components, and/or assist its functions: The eye sees form and knows it as form. Whether the seen is green, small, beautiful or shiny is discerned or decided by mind-consciousness. Any one of the five kinds of

consciousness related to the five senses must have, at the time of its arising, the mind-consciousness arise at the same time in order to function. When mind-consciousness rises by itself it generates thought. It is known as the single mind consciousness. Psychology usually stops here, with the sixth consciousness.

Textual Buddhism recognizes two additional kinds of consciousness. The seventh is named Manah and it functions as the root of the sixth kind of consciousness. Mind-consciousness rests at times, but Manah does not. It is the agency of ego-grasping that functions without interruption. It is present in all sentient beings. Whatever is perceived by us as existing, we apprehend and retain because of ego. This teaching is referred to as the Dharma of Ego Clinging. Ego-projections constitute what is held as reality by the uninformed; misconstrued as lasting, it is tenaciously held on to. This holding on to things is known in the context of Buddhadharma as the Dharma of Grasping. Delusory thought, rooted in a misconstrued notion of self and its objects as lasting and as independently existing, brings in its wake selfish concerns in their countless variations. Karmas and the concomitant suffering are the inevitable results. Because of the incessant activity of the Manah, consciousness as such is obstructed in delivering its pure, clear message. Therefore the great sages of the past referred to Manah as defiled or defilement consciousness.

Where does the ego's counterpart dwell? It resides in the eighth consciousness called Alaya and constitutes the foundation for the other seven kinds of consciousness. It acts as the storehouse for all karmas as well as their transmutations. "Alaya" is a Sanskrit term, literally meaning "non-dissolution". It conveys that there is no annihilation, only variation on what preceded. The Alaya is at times referred to as "store consciousness" because it enshrines all the seeds, including the good; the bad; the mundane; and the supramundane ones. What is meant by "seeds"? It is just another term for the latent

control the three karmas by body, speech and mind exercise over the store consciousness. The action of the karmas' latent power is known as the "perfume of the store consciousness". Remaining latent until the opportunity arises, the perfume then becomes outwardly manifest in the process called "manifested action". Manifested action re-perfumes the store consciousness and becomes a seed. The sequence from seed to perfume, to manifested action, to perfume and to seed moves on in that order. The process of one changing into the next never stops. This is how karma and store consciousness are interdependent and how they interact.

The karmic seeds contained in the store consciousness are countless. As they ripen, they produce birth after birth, death after death in a never ending process. Wholesome seeds result in good birth, unwholesome seeds, in an unwholesome one. Their wholesome quality or the lack of it depend entirely on karmic causes from a previous life. When sentient beings have produced birth in the six realms, the cycle is then termed "one round of impermanence". Karmic seeds are rooted in time and, therefore, impermanent, meaning they come into being from non-being only to vanish again, ripening one at a time. These countless karmic seeds contain the complete range of possibilities or, in other words, the full potential and therefore any sentient being may be a human being in the present life, deva in the next, and a horse in the one that will follow. The order in which karma ripens is very clear. It cannot remain the same under changing conditions and therefore rebirth has to change accordingly.

When we consider how diversified are the inclinations of the countless sentient beings, changing as they move through the six realms on the wheel of existence going back in time as far as we can imagine, we can appreciate the enormity of defilements and the resultant suffering. Innumerable texts handed down from antiquity testify to people's incessant

preoccupation with wealth, power, beauty, and honor as the concerns central to their existence. We may disbelieve the unofficial histories, but the following excerpts are from trusted Chinese annals: Po Kun turned into a bear and Ju I became a dog according to the *Book of Han*. Yang Hu was the son of Lee in his previous life as can be seen in the *Book of Ch'in*, while Emperor Liang Yuan Ti was in his previous life a monk with tiny eyes. A girl of Liu was Lee Shu in her previous life and Liu Hang was Niu Seng Ju. Fan Tsu You was Teng Yu, Kuo Hsiang Cheng was Lee Tai Pai as disclosed by the chronicle of Sung. Hsia Yuan Chi was Chu Yuan according to *Huan Ming Records*. The above evidence can be verified since it is incorporated in the official annals as indicated.

The wheel of existence is kept in motion by cause and effect and the preceding discussion was an attempt to explain this Teaching and disclose its implications. It will further our understanding if we spend a little time considering the heaviest karma in the world, i.e., taking life or killing living beings. Most people are able to see their present lives, never considering they have had innumerable previous existences. Neither do they wonder what forms of life will be theirs in their future lives. Since all living beings are very closely related through previous existences, how can anyone take the lives of other beings and eat their flesh?

The Kuang Ren's record reports that he knew of a mutton that was the ghost of his wife deceased several years past, and in the sutra of comparison of dharmas we read about a chicken served to a young man; it had the same features as his father in his previous life. No one can be sure of the kind of relationship that really exists between ourselves and the creature killed to feed us. It could be someone very close to us in our previous life. When we enjoy eating the flesh of other beings in the company of our friends and family in the present we do not give any thought to how much suffering preceded

that moment. Conversely, we are enjoying ourselves in the present and yet, as evidence indicates, we will be the flesh consumed by others in our future existence. When observed with heavenly eyes the situation appears truly tragic. The reasons used to justify taking of another being's life are irrelevant. Wherever dying is involved, there is always suffering, more so when force or violence is applied. The resulting negative energy leaves an imprint in the form of ill will waiting to manifest itself at some future occasion with retribution following in its train.

The eight kinds of consciousness jointly form what is known as "the field". The field is a feature common to all. Whoever considers taking the life of another perfumes the field via the Alaya consciousness which in turn releases the karmic seeds on the wheel of existence. In every birth and every death causes and conditions converge and give rise to retribution in a never ending cycle. Consider for instance the chronicle of Tso Chiu Ming in the Chou Dynasty: The son of a ranking official P'eng Sheng appeared in a dream as a pig-farm owner and a guide to calamity and revenge. Chao T'ung and Chao K'uo were transformed into servants by Chin K'uo's ghost for letting Chin K'uo die. Chinese history is replete with officials executed by their emperors in matters of honor; they are still waiting for their chance to avenge themselves. The picture turns from bad to worse when we consider the massive killings of innocents on a daily basis. The consequences are bound to be felt; what a pity so many people produce heavy karma during their life-span. Taking other beings' lives begins with a birthday celebration when a child is one month old and continues from one festive occasion to the next. Every special date and every celebration provides the opportunity for more killing and when there is going to be a party more killing becomes necessary. Do we need to mention weddings, national holidays and religious festivals? People take every opportunity to consume the flesh

of dead beings killed for that purpose and whose wish to go on living was not taken into account. When the mind adjusts to unrestricted killing, there is no end to the heavy karma resulting from it lifetime after lifetime.

People almost never make the connection between their own wish for a long, happy and healthy life for themselves and the daily mass-killing in which they take part. In order for us to enjoy our birthday another being must die. When a man and a woman are joined in a wedding ceremony, the event is celebrated by killing other beings of both genders. For what reason do people act this way? In the world of animals, killing for survival is common, but human beings consume dead flesh for enjoyment, and in amounts that by far exceed necessity.

The millions of beings killed throughout the world would make a mountain. Just consider for a moment all the cutting, skinning, scaling, eviscerating, scalding, boiling or even eating these beings alive. It represents endless cruelty on the part of those who are connected with it. They shiver at the mere thought of being sick or having to endure the slightest pain, not mentioning losing their own life. The tragedy of it is truly unspeakable. Unfortunately, when pain is at its most intense, there is no opportunity to complain of the unbearable suffering. The unwholesome karma produced by the mouth is unimaginable. Some of the most vicious crimes have been committed by the mouth, generating ill will for hundreds of thousands of years.

We are not unaware of the amount of evil in the world as the result of the ten unskillful karmas responsible for producing it. To take the life of a living being is the first of them. What are the remaining nine?

They are stealing; adultery; lying; double talk; coarse language; foul language; covetousness; anger; and perverted views. Each of these ten has its specific antidote, non-killing being antidote number one. This teaching is at the heart of self-

discipline as understood by Buddhists. Voluntary abstention from taking life of any living being holds the first place in each of the six sets of precepts that constitute the discipline of Buddhadharmā. The sets of five, seven and eight precepts for laity, as well as the ten precepts for novices, the Pratimokha for monks and nuns, and the bodhisattva precepts all reflect the essential tenet of non-hurting which characterizes the Buddha's teaching. Abstention from killing is thus the first requirement for generating wholesome or skillful thought. To bring about world peace, all that is necessary is to adhere to the Dharma of Ten Precepts. In the absence of intent to kill war is not possible. In the absence of intent to steal there would be no transgressions regarding property and in the absence of disregard for marriage and relationships, people's self-respect, reliability and trust would increase considerably. The degradation and the confusion due to lies, double talk, coarse and foul language would cease. In time greed, hatred and ignorance would be uprooted and sentient beings would have no further obstacles preventing them from attaining complete happiness and deliverance through enlightenment.

BUDDHADHARMA ACCORDING TO THERAVADA

Theravada or the way of the Elders and Mahayana or the great vehicle are two of the three major schools or traditions of Buddhism as practiced today. Both of them include special cultivation of faculties conducive to the attainment of supramundane knowledge. The teachings, referred to as the "Supramundane Dharma", are in complete agreement with what the Buddha taught.

The means or the textual foundations to be studied and practiced are not identical in both cases and consequently their practice and attainment are not identical either. Followers of the Theravadin tradition seek deliverance by themselves and for themselves alone. By contrast, the Mahayana teachings emphasize Buddhadharma as a vehicle similar to a raft or a boat transporting all sentient beings.

The amount of suffering in the world is unimaginable; whatever happiness there is, inevitably is lined with sorrow. The supramundane path was devised by the Buddha to address efficaciously the universal suffering and one should make a special point of studying it. In the brief discussion that follows we are going to consider the essential points of the teaching according to Theravada.

Shakyamuni Buddha was born approximately two thousand five hundred years ago in the outskirts of Kapilavastu in what is today northern India. In his late twenties he renounced his princehood and entered a spiritual path. He practiced close to nine years before attaining enlightenment and following that major event he taught Dharma for the rest of his life, converting sentient beings and leading a great number of people to enlightenment. Using expedient means, he taught according to the potential of his audience in each case and therefore his approach varied. Following the Buddha's final nirvana some five hundred of his most accomplished disciples,

all attained arhats, gathered together in the Pippala cave to collect and to render his teachings in a form that would make them survive for posterity. Their joint effort at that occasion produced the basis for textual Buddhism, known as the *Tripitaka*, a term literally meaning "three baskets" because the contents were separated into three groups according to emphasis. The *Tripitaka* is also known under the name *Pali Canon*, Pali being the language used at the time to write the teachings down. Ven. Kasyapa and Ven. Ananda, two of the monks most senior in Dharma, were given the responsibility of supervising the project. The Buddha's adherents awaited in great numbers outside the cave the outcome of the gathering, and therefore the event, known as the Great Council, is of major historical significance. The record of the Buddha's teaching was based on Ven. Ananda's recollection and substantial editing was more than likely; the occasion marks the coming into existence of Theravada. The original Sangha reassembled forming several groups, two of which became firmly established in the five hundred years following. They are known as Mahastavira and Mahasanghika. Eventually there existed in India eighteen Buddhist sects, each having its specific interpretation of the teaching for a basis. All of these followed Theravada, making it prosper and flourish. The existing sects splintered into five hundred lesser groups as the quality of practice and the understanding of the doctrine gradually declined. Almost nine hundred years after the Buddha's Parinirvana, an Indian scholar named Vasubandhu, a Bodhisattva in his own right, wrote his *Abhidharma-kosa*, a commentary of momentous importance to the understanding and development of Buddhism. Another Indian scholar named Harivarman posited a doctrine of great relevance to the systems of Buddhist thought, that of *Satya Siddhi*. The Buddhist community of India rallied into two major branches, both Theravada, incorporating the two above mentioned texts into

their textual foundations. In China under the Ch'en Dynasty, approximately one thousand years after the Buddha's Parinirvana, the Tripitaka Master Paramartha translated Vasubandhu's *Commentary on Consciousness Only* into Chinese. Known as the "early" translation, the work has been replaced with a later version by the Tripitaka Master Hsuan Tsang, dating from the T'ang Dynasty. Under Hsuan Tsang's leadership, the School of Consciousness Only has become the Dharmalaksana School (Fa Hsiang). The school held Vasubandhu's commentary as its only scriptural foundation and although referred to as a "sect", it was, more accurately, a specific type of teaching; following the decline of T'ang it was not heard from again. In the late T'ang, under the Yao Ch'in ruled by emperor Hung Chih, the Tripitaka Master Kumarajiwa translated the *Satya-siddhi-sastra* into Chinese and made its content widely known. It was studied and taught by many Dharma masters during the rule of the Six Dynasties. Satyasiddhi school was established at that time; the famous sastra constituted its sole textual foundation and like the Dharmalaksana, that school disappeared leaving only a written record behind. This brief historical outline traces the Theravada tradition in China. However, the school of three sastras, the Tien T'ai sect and several others in the Mahayana tradition have survived.

Buddhadharma as taught by Theravadins entirely transcends the world and therefore fosters great clarity of understanding of cause and effect as manifested in the context of mundane existence. Phenomena turn and change subtly and obliquely and the three marks of existence, i.e., birth, duration and death are without self, effectively controlled by karma. The adept observes the process by which phenomenon assumes form, one at a time; changes in the six realms on the wheel of life through past, present and future into birth/death; the adept observes causes and conditions until ego, wrong view and

clinging are thoroughly understood. When it is understood beyond any doubt that the pattern of birth and death together with the many kinds of defilements rise as causes and effects, then from effects which are known their causes can be traced. When the causes are correctly identified and contemplated, they vanish and when there are no causes, there are no more effects. This is essentially the method as used by Theravadins. It liberates one from one's own karma. Phenomena are recognized as impermanent, unsatisfactory and void of self; eventually, complete liberation or nirvana is attained. To transcend the world is the purpose of Buddhadharma according to the Theravada. Within it there are two vehicles by means of which liberation can be attained, namely, the vehicle of the hearer or sravaka and that of praty-eka-buddha. The former heard, understood and thereby entered the Tao; the latter observed causes and conditions and by means of that effort attained liberation. The sravaka examines dharmas in terms of the Four Noble Truths as the following table illustrates:

Four Noble Truths	Suffering	[Effect is suffering]	} Causes and effects are manifested in the world as transmigration in the six realms
	Causes of suffering	[confusion]	
	Extinction of thirst	[The effect of awakening is joy]	} Cause and effect of supramundane Dharma is the extinction of thirst and return to nirvana
	the path to such extinction	[the cause of awakening is the cause of joy]	

The doctrine as taught by Theravadins commences with karmic power as the first of the Noble Truths, i.e. suffering as the root cause of past, present and future rebirths

in the six realms. According to the *Great Wisdom Commentary*, three kinds of suffering are related to our physical bodies, namely, disease, old age and death, and three kinds of mental anguish generated by greed, hatred and ignorance. These manifest themselves in the realms of hells, animals, and hungry ghosts. In addition, we have pain and suffering due to decay as well as that due to action. There is also pain within pain, and there is the notion of suffering in the midst of happiness due to knowledge of pain's inevitability. Such deterioration of happy states is "suffering as a result of decay". When there is neither the evidence of happiness nor its decay, there is still the change due to impermanence. It is referred to as "suffering as a consequence of action".

Physical pain is caused by external conditions such as experiencing extreme cold, heat, effects of pollution, poisonous plants, having to negotiate arduous terrain and such; or by internal conditions such as thirst, hunger, exhaustion, worry, and so forth.

Realms of mental anguish include all varieties generated by interactions and relationships between people such as deceit, loss of the loved one, ambition, jealousy, and so forth. The eight kinds of suffering common to all people are: Birth; old age, disease, death, loss of love, encounter with the detestable, frustrated ambitions, and the ills related to the five skandhas. All of us are affected by these and intelligence without the support of wisdom is of no help. The search for the cause of it all begins at this point; it leads us to the second of the Noble Truths, the Cause of Suffering.

Suffering does not arise by itself but by its causes and they, in turn, arise due to karma. The three karma-generating sources are body, speech, and mind. Mind is the worst offender by far because it directs all our actions including our speech and, of course, our thoughts. Karmic manifestations of mind include the following defilements: Desire, hate,

ignorance, pride, doubt, perverted view regarding a permanent self, extreme views, deluded views, obstinate views, and rigid views regarding ascetic practices and prohibitions. Conjointly with the three realms, the above ten defilements produce eighty-eight delusory views and eighty-one kinds of misleading thoughts which, in turn, cause many kinds of suffering. Deluded views steer the nascent thoughts in the wrong direction and misinterpreted and misdirected feelings follow in its wake. Deluded views are not difficult to discard but to stop misleading or unskillful thoughts is hard to do. Defilements as causes and conditions for unwholesome karma all are rooted in deluded views and misleading thoughts and generate untold suffering. Whoever wants to get out of the endless cycle of birth and death must therefore abandon the deluded views and misleading thoughts in order to extinguish the karmic causes. This is the teaching of the third Noble Truth, i.e., the Extinction of Suffering.

Extinction is equivalent to cessation. When defilements cease, birth and death cease as well. The path to the cessation of suffering is the path to nirvana.

As the term "path" suggests, there is a destination or a goal which the path leads to. If one travels by means of "beholding the truth", one can eradicate the deluded view. By means of cultivating the truth, one can discontinue misleading thoughts. In order to achieve all this one needs to strengthen one's self-discipline, and that brings us to the three pillars of all Buddhist practice, namely discipline, concentration, and wisdom. Self-discipline is indispensable for the development of concentration which in turn stabilizes the mind and cultivates wisdom through the eradication of delusion. Thus the three studies are causally connected.

The discipline as understood by Buddhists consists of specific rules of conduct and the practice of concentration of specific dharmas. Wisdom in this particular context stands for

the absence of ego-notion and all views derived therefrom. The method used by Buddhists for that purpose includes systematic observation of one's own body as impure; one's feelings or sensations as conducive to suffering; one's own mind as impermanent and all of this world as without a nature of its own.

Why should we regard our bodies as impure? Please try to reconstruct in your mind how you obtained your body starting from its very beginning. It commenced from the fluids produced by your parents' bodies, and was followed by a sojourn in the fluids of the womb; then the passage through the vagina into this world that is so dirty it can never be made clean again. The body spontaneously generates filth without and within and the process continues as long as one lives. After life's end, tiny creatures deep in the ground as well as the countless bacteria will devour the remains, generating more uncleanness. Examining this body, where is its purity? Embracing couples experience happiness, unaware it is like two bags of bones embracing. To restrain and ultimately extinguish one's greed manifesting itself as desire is quite difficult and therefore we are advised to regard our bodies as impure.

Why is it said that feelings or sensations always result in suffering? Feeling or sensation is a combination of mind and body. When a happy state predominates there is nevertheless the awareness of its impermanence, and therefore the correct understanding of happiness is that it is layered with suffering. Pleasure is by definition enjoyable while it lasts, but once it has vanished, it is replaced with intense suffering. For those who have renounced the world there is neither suffering nor happiness. There is only an awareness of change, accompanied by equanimity. Such attitude is exactly the opposite of that adopted by people of worldly concerns. They never leave the seesaw of happy and unhappy mind-frames and

the inevitable result is suffering. The observation of feelings as they turn into suffering is an excellent practice that reveals all attachments as meaningless bondage.

How can one observe the impermanence of one's own mind? Every rising thought is a shadow of the six conditioned sense-data. When observed closely, the activity of the mind is revealed as completely rooted in time. It consists of one thought following another, each of them rising when the preceding one has disappeared without trace and this pattern can never stop. The mind can only hold one thought at a time. To examine the passing thoughts one after another is to become fully aware of their insubstantial and deceptive nature. Every thought rises because of causes and conditions and since these change continually, the resulting thoughts change also thus manifesting their impermanence. Whoever practices according to this teaching can eradicate grasping.

What is the meaning of "all of this world is without nature of its own"? Absolutely everything including the last atom changes from one moment to the next and therefore all existence is a never ending transition. The timing or the pace at which transition occurs is determined by the dynamics of karma and since these are not the same in each case, the timing of the transition varies accordingly. For this reason it is stated that "all of this world is without nature of its own". One's own self, as well as that of other beings are merely inferred. A practice of this Dharma discloses where defilements come from. The four Dharmas are known in the Theravada teachings as *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, considered essential to the enlightening practice in the Theravada tradition. In addition, their practice includes the Four Good Roots and the Five Meditations. We hope to study these at another occasion. This is the teaching of the Fourth Noble Truth, the Path.

In our present survey of Buddhadharma according

to Theravada, we have covered so far the Four Noble Truths; the doctrine of cause and effect; an examination of feelings or sensations in terms of happiness and suffering; and delusion and enlightenment as the two opposites in reference to the Four Noble Truths. It may seem somewhat unusual to begin with the effect and then turn to the cause, proceeding backwards, but the effect is easier to understand. To begin with that which is still fresh in one's memory and then retrieve the more subtle connections that have already meshed with the flux, is more efficacious. For the purpose of generating dislike for the worldly we have pointed out the resulting suffering in the three realms and showed how by eradicating the causes the joy of nirvana can be attained. Later on there will be an opportunity to examine the causes of the Tao.

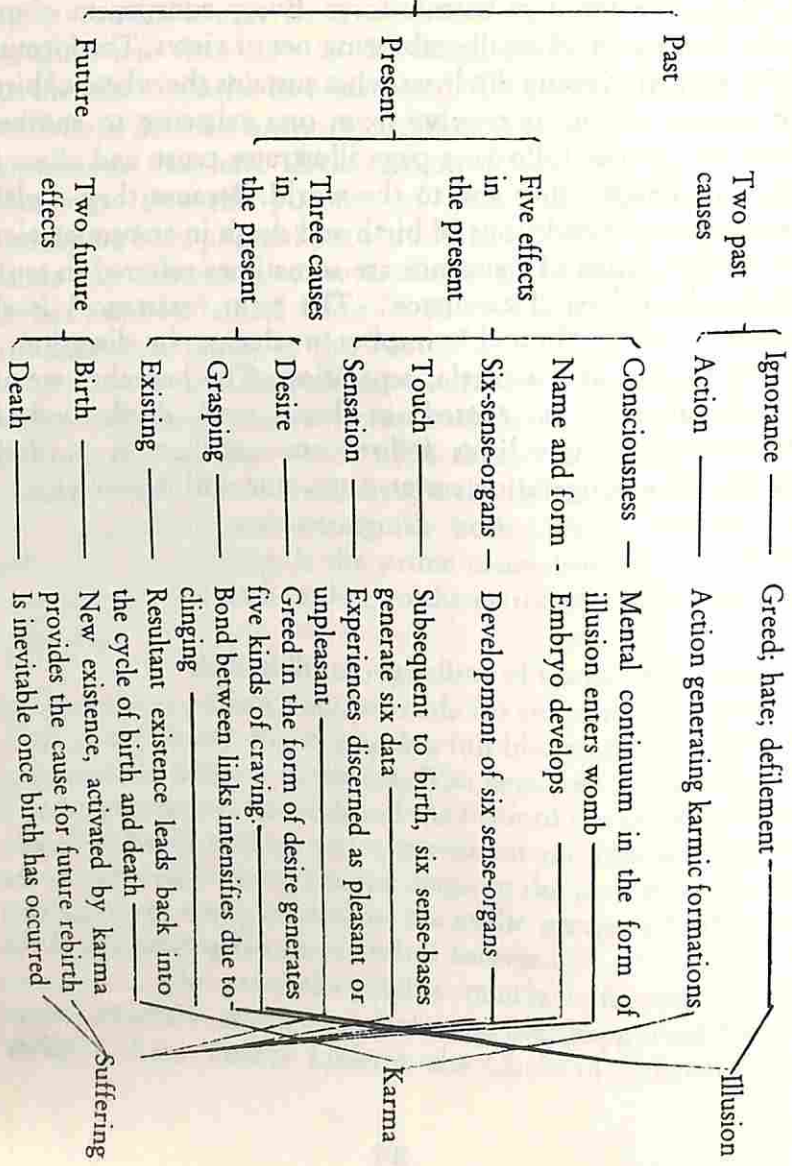
A sravaka should understand the Four Noble Truths in the order they are presented. First, perceive suffering as retribution in the rounds of birth and death, and vow to eradicate its causes. Second, discern the link connecting karma with defilements and extinguish both. Third, realize that extinction of suffering is the prime cause leading to nirvana. Fourth, enter the path leading to the extinction of passion and to nirvana.

In all Buddhism regardless of tradition, practice is the essential expedient, indispensable for successful completion of the task at hand. Practice makes full liberation accessible to all potentials without exception. The next step along the path to enlightenment is the Path and the Fruit of the arhat, attained when ego-based notions and concomitant misleading thoughts are abandoned. Arhat is the last stage on the path of a sravaka, leading to the complete halt of the cyclic pattern of birth and death and leaving the three realms forever.

The praty-eka-buddha vehicle is focused on the causal structure of the round of existence, supported by the method of the Twelve Links in the Chain of Existence also

known as dependent arising, defined as the arising of effects evenly in dependence on a conjunction of conditions; no single cause can produce an effect, nor does only one effect arise from a given cause. The world we live in is continually built by ourselves, the result of karmic force. Every constituent of our world is one part of an all-embracing net of views. The formula of Dependent Arising discloses what sustains the wheel of birth and death, making it revolve from one existence to another. The table on the following page illustrates cause and effect in relation to each other and to the world. Because they explain the causes and conditions of birth and death in transmigration, the Twelve Links of Existence are sometimes referred to as the "twelve branches of existence". The term "existence" is all-inclusive while "branch" implies a change in direction, a branching out and a partial separation. The branches we are talking about are rooted in birth and death and in transmigration; the links follow one another in orderly fashion. The progression never stops, nor will it ever end.

Twelve Links in the Chain of Existence



1) *Due to ignorance arise karmic formations:* Ignorance is interpreted in this context as non-knowing or knowing wrongly and can be compared to the absence of light. It is most common among sentient beings and therefore they are unable to determine what is pure and what is defiled; what is cause and what is effect. Unaware of retribution in the form of suffering in the three evil realms not far off in their future they are stunted by the workings of humans and heaven. Ignorance is the chief condition of defilements.

2) *With karmic formations as condition arises action:* Karmas accumulated during previous existences manifest themselves as actions by body, speech and mind. Past causes produce present effects.

3) *With action as condition arises consciousness:* Karma-generated actions condition resultant kinds of consciousness both wholesome and unwholesome. At the moment of conception an especially potent karmic formation accumulated in the karmic continuum of the deceased being generates rebirth consciousness in the realm appropriate for that karma to mature. During the course of existence, other accumulated karmas generate other resultant types of consciousness according to circumstances.

4) *With consciousness as conditions name-and-form (mind-and-body) come to be:* The term "name" denotes mind and "form" stands for material phenomena produced by karma. In those realms where all five aggregates are found, consciousness conditions mind and matter together. In the event of such rebirth, three mental aggregates arise simultaneously with the rebirth-linking consciousness, namely, feeling, perception and mental formations along with the form skandha that includes body, gender and heart-base. In the case of a human embryo, these are first present as latent potential and develop along with the development of the embryo.

5) *With name-and-form as condition, the six sense*

bases come to be: Of the six sense bases, the first five are the sensitive matter of the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body. The sensuous plane mind-and-matter conditions the arising of all six sense bases. When the karma-born material phenomena arise, as in the case of the human embryo, they condition the arising of the five sense organs, developing as the embryo grows.

6) *With the six sense bases as condition arises contact:* Contact here denotes the contact with resultant consciousness. It is the "coming together" of consciousness and the mental factors with an object by means of any one of the six sense bases. As contact can occur only when the sense bases exist, it is said that contact is dependent on the six sense bases. It is the connection with the "outside world" once the baby is born.

7) *With contact as condition arises feeling:* Whenever contact occurs, feeling arises simultaneously, conditioned by the same contact. There are six classes of feeling corresponding with the six sense bases. In terms of its affective quality, feeling may be pleasant, painful or neutral, according to the base and contact. The above five links or branches are the result of suffering in the present.

8) *With feeling as condition, craving comes to be:* Feeling conditions the arising of craving. If one experiences a pleasant feeling, one relishes that feeling and desires the object only insofar as it arouses the pleasant feeling. On the other hand, when one experiences a painful feeling, one has a craving to be free from the pain, longing for a pleasurable feeling to replace it. Thus many kinds of desire arise, conditioned by feeling.

9) *With craving as condition, clinging or grasping come to be:* Craving -- a mode of greed or wrong view comes to be when craving for gratification of the senses intensifies and turns into clinging or grasping. In the weak, initial stages the greed for an object is called craving; the intensified form of greed is called clinging or grasping.

10) *With clinging as condition, existence comes to be:* Clinging is a condition for active existence because, under the influence of clinging, one engages in action that is accumulated as karma. It includes clinging to the notion of an "ego" and all the states associated with it. Clinging is a condition for resultant existence because that same clinging leads one back into rebirth in a state determined by one's karma. When the seeds are sown, the paddy will grow. In the same way the karma generated in the present will produce an effect in the future. The three links given above are present causes, having suffering for effect in the future.

11) *With existence coming into being as condition, birth comes to be:* Birth is understood as the arising of mundane consciousness and karma-born matter in a new life, new realm of existence. The essential condition for future birth to occur lies in our present existence.

12) *Dependent on birth arise decay and death:* Once birth has occurred, old age or decay and death must inevitably follow, as well as all the suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair in between. All of these are rooted in birth, and therefore birth is singled out as their principal condition. Birth and death are future effects of suffering.

Upon examining the above twelve links we, realize that ignorance, craving and clinging are rooted in delusion. Ignorance or delusion is a past cause, craving and clinging are two kinds of delusion operative in the present. Consciousness, name-and-form, the six sense bases, contact, feeling, birth, old age and death all represent retribution through suffering. Action and existence are karma-generating agents. As the above table illustrates, links number two through ten are completed in the present. Ignorance is the root of greed manifesting itself as craving and clinging; existence manifests itself as action, thus generating future rebirths and bringing suffering as retribution in its wake. This process is the same as when past experiences

influence the present. Every future rebirth will initiate exactly the same sequence as the present one, for as long as ignorance is the root base, the cycle will predictably and inevitably repeat itself. The exact repetition of this pattern enables one to see one's previous existence. One is able to appreciate the amount of evil or unskillful karmas one has generated due to ignorance, thereby planting causes for suffering in the rounds of birth and death to come. One must endure another rebirth due to deluded view and misguided thought: Following that, one will develop the six sense bases with their corresponding six-fold data, formulate more deluded views and develop attachments generated by greed in the present, followed by retribution in the future. For most of the people, that is what they perceive as reality from which they proceed with the planting of further causes of suffering. Thus the cycle of rebirths is perpetuated. According to the formula of the Twelve Links in the Chain of Existence, this is the entrance into transmigration.

However, the supramundane Dharma provides a second alternative: By means of understanding the Four Noble Truths and by sustained practice, those on the path are empowered to eradicate ignorance and its concomitant defilements. The cessation of ignorance causes cessation of karma-generating actions, cessation of karma generating action causes cessation of relinking consciousness, that in turn causes cessation of name-and-form, cessation of name-and-form causes cessation of six sense bases and in the absence of the six sense bases there is cessation of contact, cessation of feeling and cessation of grasping. Since no karma is being generated in the present, there can be no rebirth and without rebirth no aging, no death is possible. Consequently there will be no suffering in the future. Without birth and death, the cause of cessation has nirvana or final extinction for effect. This is the final extinction according to the formula of Twelve Links in the Chain of Existence read anti-clockwise. The fruition thus attained is the

most advanced stage of praty-eka-buddha. For a person of such attainment there is no more rebirth.

The formula demonstrates that the chain of existence consists of several layers of cause and effect. The present is the result of past causes; it also generates causes the results of which will mature in the future. Future first becomes present and then, the past. The effects turn in time into causes which, in turn, will produce more effects. Normally the pattern repeats itself without beginning and without end.

The entire universe can thus be viewed as an intricate net of karmic forces endlessly perpetuating themselves as cyclic patterns rooted in time. The Twelve Links in the Chain of Existence disclose the source of all karmas and consequently the source of all there is. Theravada practice approaches the twelve links in terms of the Four Noble Truths as follows:

The first five links of the twelve confirm the second of the Four Noble Truths, i.e., the Noble Truth of the causes of suffering.

The first and the second of the twelve links tie the past to the present, and the third, fourth and fifth operate in the present. The five links following, namely, the links number six, seven, eight, nine and ten, are operative in the present, jointly with links numbered eleven and twelve that ripen in the future and assert the first of the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Truth of Suffering.

Mindful observation of the twelve links is cultivation of wisdom that reveals the way to extinction, while the complete extinction of all twelve links is nirvana; it is the final attainment of praty-eka-buddha and of the arhat. Although the method for this path to enlightenment is unlike other methods, it shares with them the same foundation of the three studies, namely discipline, concentration and wisdom. All of Buddhist practice has one goal, namely, the eradication of

defilement and the attainment of full awakening. It comprises the development of rare powers of the senses, the knowledge of previous existences, the capability to appear in any place at will and insight into the termination of transmigration. As long as the meditator possesses a body, nirvana is incomplete. Parinirvana or "nothing remaining beyond nirvana" manifests itself at the time of dissolution of the retribution-body, when there is nothing left to hold on to. Such is the absolute state according to Theravada. Study of the doctrine according to Theravada reveals that the sravaka, the praty-eka-buddha and the arhat all have for their purpose the extinction of birth and death, the eradication of greed, hatred and ignorance and the attainment of complete and perfect enlightenment.

BUDDHADHARMA ACCORDING TO MAHAYANA

Teachings according to Mahayana likewise aim to transcend the world, but they are at the same time aware of the world and useful to the world. Meditators in the Theravada tradition seek great awakening first of all for themselves alone and their minds, absorbed in practice, allow no room and no time to thoughts of the suffering of sentient beings. Those aware of their Bodhi mind will make the great vow, wanting to follow the Mahayana tradition.

During the five hundred years following the Buddha's Parinirvana the master's teaching spread throughout India and Theravada was its only vehicle. The first literary work characterizing the distinctive features of Mahayana was the *Awakening of Faith* by Ashvaghosa Bodhisattva. Seven hundred years after the Buddha's Parinirvana, Nagarjuna Bodhisattva founded and perfected The Madhyamika system. Two brothers, the fully emancipated Bodhisattvas Asanga and Vashubandhu, founded and systematized the Yogacara philosophy almost nine hundred years after the Buddha's final nirvana. The early development was followed by the splitting up of the Mahayana doctrine into two schools: The school of nature and the school of form. The first taught Mahayana Dharma of the Formless, sometimes referred to as the School of Voidness, and the second taught Mahayana Dharma of Form and was known as the School of Existence. The two schools gained considerable ground and attracted numerous outstanding teachers. By the time the profound teaching was introduced to China it had been already meticulously formulated by a host of illustrious sages and propagated the world over.

Buddhadharma blended harmoniously with the Chinese thought and its teachings were thoroughly understood there. Eventually, ten sects came onto existence; most were

Mahayana, some Theravada, while some combined the two.

During the late Han and Chin Dynasties, three monks were engaged in a translation of Buddhist texts. Venerable Kasyapamatanga, An Shih Kao and Dharmaraksa translated some of the Mahayana sutras from the original Sanskrit into Chinese but their translations have not become widely known. It was not until the eastern Tsin that the *Tripitaka* was translated in full by Kumarajiva and made known to a very large audience. Several major sutras of the Mahayana cannon, namely the *Avatamsaka*, *Nirvana*, *Vaipulya*, and the *Vijnanamatra-vada* as well as many additional texts were translated by Bhadrpada, T'an Wu Chen, Bodhiruci and Paramartha and others. In the T'ang Dynasty, Tripitaka Master Husan Tsang journeyed to India in search of original Buddhist texts which he subsequently translated, thereby assuring their authenticity. Esoteric sutras were translated by Wu Wei, Vajrabodhi, Amohavajra and several other monks whose practice was Tantric and the *Avatamsaka* sutra was translated for the second time by Siksanda. Due to great and continuing efforts by numerous translators endowed with inner light, people were taught by these expedient means and as the result of it the following eight sects have survived and continued to prosper: The School of Three Commentaries; Fa Hsiang; T'ien Tai; Hua-Yen; True Word (Esoteric); Pure Land; Ch'an; and Vinaya (Discipline). The preceding was a brief summary of the historical and textual development of Buddhism in China and now we are ready to glance at the goals set out by Mahayana.

Mahayana is often referred to as the "Bodhisattva Vehicle". The Sanskrit term "bodhisattva" is composed of the root word bodhi, i.e. perfect wisdom (prajna), and sattva, meaning an "awakened being whose actions without exception make for harmony". Thus the term stands for a being both enlightened and enlightening. A bodhisattva is often referred to as the "great sentient being". By what means can one become

such a person? Generating great compassion and great vow; endeavoring to attain concentration, the level of which is equaled with that of one's wisdom; being determined to benefit all sentient beings and by those means achieving perfect unity with all others; applying the most expedient Dharma in each situation as the best method of teaching. For the completion of the bodhisattva career it is necessary to generate the Bodhi mind and thereby obtain the great Tao.

One should be frequently thinking of all buddhas; contemplating body as suffering; seeking the supreme fruit steadfast on the path; and practicing kindness and compassion for all sentient beings. The following is an excerpt from Vashubandhu Bodhisattva's commentary (sastra), consisting of four points essential for practice, each of which is elucidated by five explanatory notes:

Five Contemplations of all Buddhas

1) Contemplating all buddhas past, present and future in the ten directions, and realizing that initially theirs were minds defiled just as ours are presently. They have attained complete enlightenment, each deserving the title of the World Honored One.

2) Contemplating all buddhas in the three periods, I endeavor to generate an intrepid mind like theirs; since they have attained the great awakening, I should be able to do likewise.

3) Contemplating all buddhas in the three periods, their giving rise to boundless, luminous wisdom, their great endurance and purifying actions: Through their own effort they uprooted obstacles and defilements and transcended the three realms. I shall follow their example and attain the way they did.

4) Contemplating all buddhas in the three periods, great heroes among human beings, who have crossed the ocean of defilement, of birth and death. I recognize that I am a human being like them and that I am capable of following their example.

5) Contemplating all buddhas in the three periods and how they made enormous progress abandoning mundane concerns and wealth bringing to light unfathomable wisdom. I presently determine to learn how to follow their example.

Five Contemplations of Body-as-suffering

1) Contemplating my body as five skandhas and four elements, and the numberless evil karmas generated thereby, I want to abandon it all.

2) Contemplating my body with all its impurities and all the dirty outflows from its nine openings, I cultivate revulsion.

3) Contemplating my body with all its greed, hatred and ignorance and countless defilements, I want to abandon it all.

4) contemplating my body as a bubble, as froth, as birth and death, thought after thought, I want to depart from it all.

5) Contemplating my body as being imbued with ignorance, generating immeasurable evil karma and turning on the wheel of life in the six ways with no benefit whatsoever, I want to abandon it all.

Five Contemplations Leading to the Attainment of the Supreme Fruit

1) Contemplating the distinctive and luminous adornment of the characteristic marks on the physical bodies of

all Tathagatas, I want to learn and to practice, knowing that to encounter them is to be rid of defilements.

2) Contemplating the Dharmakaya of all Tathagatas, forever stainless and completely free from defilements, I want to learn and practice.

3) Contemplating all Tathagatas, their irreproachable morality and tranquillity, recognizing their relinquishment of delusive thoughts, observing their limitless wisdom and omniscience radiate the unconditioned state of nirvana, I want to learn and practice.

4) Contemplating the Tathagatas and their ten powers, four kinds of fearless states and their boundless compassion, I want to learn and practice.

5) Contemplating all the Tathagatas who pity, commiserate and protect all sentient beings, correcting delusion due to their many kinds of wisdom, I want to learn and practice.

Five Contemplations of Compassion for Sentient Beings

1) Contemplating all sentient beings as confined by ignorance and attachments, enduring great suffering. They shun the teaching of cause and effect and generate evil karma. Ignoring the true Dharma they stray on the heterodox path and drown in the sea of defilement.

2) Contemplating all sentient beings hamstrung by many kinds of suffering, I see their dread of birth, disease, old age and death. Oblivious of liberation they perpetuate evil karmas and their actions never cease to produce sorrow, suffering and defilements. When separated from their loved one(s) they continue to cling. When compelled to face what they hate, they do not relinquish their resentment. Furthermore, they continue generating anger and jealousy, thus bringing more evil to this world.

3) Contemplating all sentient beings committing evil karma due to their countless, varied desires, I pity them. Although they may have reached an understanding of desires as tied to suffering, they cannot relinquish them. When wishing to reach the joyous states, they lack the requisite discipline, and though they need not necessarily suffer in these instances, they plant causes of suffering.

4) Contemplating all sentient beings and their actions laden with evil, the way they transgress the grave precepts while trembling with fear and apprehension, engage in the five rebellious actions, devoid of shame, slander true Dharma as well as the Mahayana Dharma. They follow ego-based views and their actions are self-serving and arrogant and while sentient beings do not lack ability, they are intoxicated by conceit and see no reason for repentance; thus they break off their good root.

5) Contemplating all sentient beings as they reject the practice of true Dharma, born at the time when due to eight conditions it is difficult to see a buddha and hear the Dharma; reflecting on those who, though born at the time of the Buddha and having heard the true Dharma, did not accept and upheld it, but became involved in heterodox practices and/or harsh ascetic discipline instead. They overlook the right path then and they overlook it now. Those who have reached the heavenly realm of neither thinking nor non-thinking, mistake it for nirvana and do not realize that when their wholesome retribution runs out, they must return to the three ways.

In all four articles above, compassion for all sentient beings holds a place of special importance. In the words of Vashubandhu Bodhisattva, "When observing sentient beings endlessly perpetuating evil karma that results in suffering due to ignorance, bodhisattvas give rise to great compassion and seek to attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi as if their heads were

on fire. They think that all sentient beings are defiled and resolve to save them all." The sentient beings are greatly deluded and boundless compassion is necessary in order to help them. Compassion can bring them happiness and let them depart from suffering. All bodhisattvas practice the six paramitas and ten thousand pure actions to assist and save all sentient beings. Compassion is the foundation that supports all existence and sentient beings are expediently converted by countless dharmas.

In the discourse on Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's practices and vows, the *Avatamsaka* sutra says: "When a bodhisattva accords with sentient beings, then he accords with and makes offerings to all buddhas. To honor and serve all sentient beings is equal to paying homage to all Tathagatas. Why? Because an all-embracing, compassionate heart that welcomes all sentient beings is the essence and the origin of the Tathagata." It is the means of generating Bodhi-citta, whereby incomparable enlightenment is attained.

When a tree grows in the poor soil of the wilderness and its roots receives water, it develops plentiful foliage; it blooms and bears fruit. The Bodhi tree, king among trees, growing in the wilderness of life and death, has all sentient beings for its roots and all bodhisattvas and all buddhas for blossoms and fruit. When sentient beings encounter all-embracing compassion, the Bodhi tree will bloom and bear the fruit of bodhisattvas and buddhas. How? The bodhisattvas have attained supreme, perfect enlightenment. This being so sentient beings are indispensable to Bodhi. Without them no bodhisattva would ever attain the incomparable enlightenment.

Men and women from good families, please consider this parable carefully. Look upon sentient beings with an impartial mind and cultivate all-embracing compassion. To bestow this compassion on all sentient beings without

exception is comparable to being successful when making an oblation to all Tathagatas. A bodhisattva's effort to compassionately yield to all sentient beings will never cease; not even when sunya-dhatu, spheres, karma and defilements of sentient beings come to an end. My effort of concord will never cease, but will be pursued with incessant and unremitting concentration, culminating in indefatigable actions of my body, my discourse and my volition."

For the practice of bodhisattva action it is required that one aspires upwards, seeking buddhahood, and proceeds downward converting sentient beings. Faith is the dynamic of the upward move, compassion that of downward.

For saving sentient beings Bodhi is the key expedient. But what kind of karmic action is needed to produce expedient Dharma? Discipline, concentration and wisdom are, no doubt, the universal foundation. In addition to these, three more virtues are recommended for well rounded practice. Charity, patience and zeal, in addition to discipline, meditation and wisdom complete the set of the six paramitas or virtues. Zeal assures progress, charity or giving fosters openness toward all sentient beings, and patience supports diligence in study and practice. The six paramitas can ferry oneself and others across the sea of birth and death to the shore of nirvana.

The first perfected virtue is giving or dana-paramita in Sanskrit; it includes three kinds of giving. A pure being endowed with morality can give property or wealth to the point of giving up all he/she has. Or a bodhisattva who has understood poverty makes the gift of his/her body, speech and thought by means of spreading Buddhadharma. He/she may renounce his/her head, hands, or any part of his/her body while maintaining the mind of equanimity; or give up own country, family or spouse and turn the merit over to all sentient beings. Providing protection from danger or assurance of safety is the last of the three kinds of giving (abhaya-pra-dana

in Sanskrit). The most excellent of all is the gift of complete enlightenment for the benefit of the world. When a bodhisattva has given a gift, he/she never expects a reward, nor does he/she give any thought to the recipient of the gift. According to the *Vajracchedika-prajnaparamita Sutra (Diamond Sutra)* "A bodhisattva's mind should not abide anywhere when giving alms". Although the mind does not abide anywhere, it nevertheless does not exhaust cause and effect and the bodhisattva's merits of retribution and blessings surpass by far those of someone with a hidden agenda when doing good. The pure and passion-free being, liberated of karmic action, can recover the original perfection of his/her luminous mind and by comprehending it he or she, the bodhisattva, can surpass all the merit in the world. Such circumstances are pristine, incomparable and outstanding.

The second is morality (silaparamita). Perfect morality is the foremost quality of enlightenment. The object of this virtue is to develop an acute sense of wholesome action strengthened by refraining from evil actions, thus generating the cool calm of perfect morality while the one practicing it is still attached to the sense-qualities. The guidelines, called precepts, are usually arranged in sets. In Buddhist practice seven sets of precepts are known; within these, the number of precepts increases in proportion to the depth of commitment on the part of the practitioner. Chinese adherents to the teachings of Confucius, for example, follow rules whereby ceremonies are performed at the sound of appropriate music as a means to establish the mind of courtesy, delight and happiness. There should not be anything contrived and during such an occasion everything should happen naturally. Our practice of precepts, once we have accepted them, should be uninterrupted in order to eradicate our defilements.

The third is the perfected virtue of patience (ksantiparamita). Insults are very difficult to bear. When a

bodhisattva hears someone speaking to him/her harshly and offensively, he/she wisely remains quite at ease and contented. Some insults can be considered good teaching and there is no reason for anger. One may ask oneself, "who speaks, who hears, how, to whom, by whom?" How can one's left hand fight with one's right hand? To separate oneself from the thieves-as-defilements, one should think "as many ills as there are in the world, I will endure them all." Then the practitioner stands in the perfection of patience.

The fourth is the perfection of vigor or zeal (virya-paramita). The practitioner on the enlightening path needs to foster a pure and courageous mind when practicing the excellent perfection of vigor. Keeping in mind his/her duty towards other beings, day and night in his thought free from hesitation he/she abides in his/her resolute intention similar to that of a mother attending to her only child.

The fifth is concentration or meditation (Ch'an in Chinese, dhyana-paramita in Sanskrit). In its early stages, this practice calms the body and focuses the mind, freeing it from stray thoughts. The concentration applied to daily activity may lead to samadhi of action. Practice-of-Principle samadhi is described in the *Awakening of Faith* as follows: "(The adept) should be in a quiet place, sit erect and even-tempered and should not pay attention to breathing, nor to form or color, space, earth, water, fire, wind, the seen, the remembered, the heard, the conceived. Arising thoughts should be instantly released and the thought of releasing them should, likewise, be allowed to vanish. Whatever is out there transcends thought and should not be produced and extinguished moment to moment. The meditator should not meditate on the 'external' objects of the senses and subsequently negate them, eventually negating the meditating mind. Should the mind wander, it should be gently led back to the correct thought. It should be understood that 'correct thought' is the thought that is of the

moment. All is mind only and whatever 'externals' are there cannot be truly known to us. The mind is likewise void of permanent properties and therefore is inconceivable at any given moment. When the meditator engages in activities such as walking, standing or moving about, he/she should be mindful at all times, continuously observing and examining. This discipline of the mind takes a long time to master, but once it is accomplished the mind is completely subdued and well trained. Such a quality will, in turn, empower the meditator to bring to fruition 'cessation' and to sustain the state known as the 'concentration or samadhi of suchness'; all his/her defilements are eradicated and faith is increased. Thereafter the state of non-retrogression follows." To summarize, there is mundane absorption, supramundane absorption, and an absorption that surpasses the supramundane. There is a fourth absorption as well; it will be discussed at another opportunity.

The sixth is the perfection of wisdom (prajnaparamita). It is said that the one who trains in perfection of wisdom trains in buddhahood. To abide in perfect wisdom one must abide in Emptiness, meaning that the mind is like a perfect mirror that reflects everything but has no wish to hold on to any of the reflections. Perfection of wisdom arms the adept with acute discernment of true from false as applied to teachings, to views and to paths. In the Mahayana tradition it is expected that the practitioner will attend to all six paramitas because they are designed to be mutually supportive and enhance one another. Without concentration, wisdom is difficult to attain, and without wisdom meditation is mere physical exercise. Without vigor or zeal, progress in practice is unlikely. Without the virtue of giving, vigor or zeal will be thwarted and the meditator will not be able to accept and save sentient beings. And without the three studies, namely discipline, concentration and wisdom, the practice of giving will

not result in planting good causes for heavens and for human beings. Upholding discipline without patience makes work with one's anger futile. Vigor by itself can only lead to a dead end.

In accordance with the Mahayana Dharma, all of the six virtues must be perfected and that is a task that requires more than just one or two lifetimes. To attain such perfection one will have to endure the cycle of birth and death for many kalpas to come. It is distressing to realize that we not accomplished any in our previous existences, and what we have learned, we have forgotten at the time of our rebirth. We have to make the following four great vows:

Sentient beings are numberless. I vow to save them.
Defilements are countless. I vow to eradicate them all.
The dharma-doors are limitless. I vow to master them.
The supreme enlightenment I vow to attain.

These vows should be repeated daily, made to act as a rudder, maintaining the meditator steadily on the course to enlightenment. When the six paramitas are practiced diligently, supreme enlightenment can be attained independently of what school or vehicle the adept practices.

It is hoped that the above presentation of Mahayana Dharma has succeeded in conveying its great potential for the enhancement of spirituality.

To hear the Dharma and to see it practiced is a rare privilege, the result of great causes and conditions converging. The Dharmakaya, or the Buddha's essential nature or the Void aspect, formless and inconceivable, completely pervades the Dharmadhatu. The visible human body of the Buddha in the world of mind-produced forms is called Nirmanakaya or the transformation body. Because sentient beings are numberless, the stature of the transcendental Buddha is commensurate or boundless. He manifests himself in form

and size that correspond to the potential of those he is responding to. Initially, Buddhadharmā was not distinct from all other existence and there was nothing to be said; the term "Buddhadharmā" did not exist, the teaching had no form. If there was no Buddha and no great enlightenment first, there could be no Dharma to be taught and no path to be revealed afterwards. The Buddha's appearance in the world and his teaching were expedient means to save all sentient beings, and since sentient beings vary greatly, the Buddha adjusted his method accordingly. This point is particularly important for the student of Buddhist history in order to avoid biased views. It is difficult to assure perfect delivery of the teaching in every single instance and it is twice as difficult to adjust it to the capacity of the audience in each case so the two mesh without residue. Teaching that matches perfectly the potential of those who listen is perfect Dharma. Because of the varied potentials, there are dissimilar versions of the teaching and therefore Mahayana and Theravada are unlike each other.

A rule of conduct for bodhisattvas advises them to "be particularly cautious on two points: First, one should not expound small teaching to a great potential because it would make him/her backslide, second, avoid teaching the profound Dharma to a small potential lest he/she give rise to doubt. We need to keep in mind there is only one source of all teachings and remind ourselves that is why all of the dharmas are perfect; the differences come from diverse formulations. Yet, though diverse, these formulations mesh, providing us with a configuration of check-points, helpful to our orientation when we first encounter Dharma. The result is similar to a map, where longitudes and latitudes intersect at specific points. They are interdependent and the one cannot attain full significance without the others. There are really no grounds for disagreement; a square table, when observed from diverse vantage-points, offers dissimilar views; yet though dissimilar,

they all relate to the same table. The same may be said in respect to Mahayana and Theravada. Although they are dissimilar, both truthfully relate the same teacher's teaching.

Buddhadharma makes true reality of all existence in the universe comprehensible. The flux of life has no beginning and no end, as witnessed by all buddhas past, present and future in the ten directions. In our era, the teacher we learn from is Shakyamuni Buddha on whose ocean of enlightenment we have been drawing for over two thousand years. Today, his Dharma is known and practiced in the greater part of the world with some variations due to time, place and to personalities.

The history of early Buddhism sheds light on what motivated Buddhist practitioners then; since most adherents were concerned with their own salvation, the expedient teaching was what later became the Theravada. To this day, that tradition has remained dominant in India and in the countries of south-east Asia. The Buddha's teaching, however, contained not only the beginnings of Theravada, but of Mahayana as well. Some of those were subsequently reiterated by Manjushri, Maitreya and others who attained the Bodhi mind. The Tathagata was self-enlightened and he guided countless others to enlightenment by teaching them his method; the Venerable Mahakasyapa and Venerable Mahamaudgalyana were among them. When the World Honored One raised his hand holding a flower and Mahakasyapa smiled, the astonishing Dharma-transmission independent of words was initiated at that moment.

During the five hundred years immediately following the Buddha's final nirvana, two schools of Buddhadharma predominated, namely the Mahasanghika and the Mahasthavira. Both adhered to the 'Small' Vehicle (Theravada). The aspect of the Buddha's teaching subsequently formulated as the Great Vehicle or Mahayana remained latent

and emerged gradually. Close to nine hundred years after the Buddha's Parinirvana, Bodhisattvas Nagarjuna, Asanga and Vasubandhu, assisted by their teachers Manjushri and Maitreya gave that part of the Buddha's teaching its present form. In India, the surviving remnants of Buddhadharmas have 'Small' Vehicle for their bases; Mahayana sutras written in Sanskrit, discovered in northern India and Nepal, were damaged. Furthermore, no centers for the dissemination of Dharma were in existence there. The sutras made available to us by the school of Theravada were written in Pali and preserved for posterity in Ceylon (present Sri Lanka) during the reign of King Asoka in India. These sutras and commentaries serve as textual foundation for the Dharma centers in Burma and Thailand as well. Many Buddhists from North America and Europe travel to south-east Asia to study Theravada Buddhism there.

The third major system of Buddhist thought had its headquarters in Tibet. The lamaic "Red Sect" was established by means of "Born in Lotus Flower" Bodhisattva Mahasattva and somewhat later Tson-kha-pa founded the "Yellow Sect", developed and centralized chiefly in Mongolia. Because of the marked similarity between the Tibetan and the Sanskrit languages, many fundamental Mahayana sutras were preserved in Tibet; the esoteric school was transmitted directly from India; the sutra and sastra on nature and form, and the Mahayana Vinaya (rules of conduct) survived the ages in perfect condition there. Although the esoteric Dharma was taught in Tibetan, it was beneficial to numerous devotees through translations. Japan and Korea, on the other hand, acquired their Buddhist system from China where, by then, it has been established for seven hundred years. It was a very powerful source that carried Buddhadharmas far and wide, and via Japan and Korea the propagation of the teachings spread even further. Chinese Buddhism developed along characteristically Chinese

lines and its roots are in the Chinese culture, but it has taken more than seven hundred years of assimilation. Both the 'Small' and the Great Vehicles reached China due to scores of Buddhist monks who came from India by land from the West and via the maritime route from the South. The texts the monks brought with them were then translated from the original Pali or Sanskrit. Several heroic Chinese, namely Fa Hsien, Hsuen Tsang and I Chin journeyed to India in search of authentic textual Dharma and the materials they brought when they returned to China were meticulously translated and avidly studied. At the decline of the T'ang and the Sui Dynasties, both Mahayana and Theravada textual foundations were assimilated in China.

Since four of the Chinese Buddhist sects, namely the Dharma Nature, the Dharmalaksana of the great Vehicle, the Satyasiddhi, and Kosa of the Small Vehicle, were transmitted directly from India to China, both the Mahayana and the Theravada Vinayas or rules of conduct came along with them. Dharma in its completeness can be found in the teachings of the Tien T'ai sect and of the Hwa Yen sect. The Ch'an sect was initiated by Bodhidharma, a scholarly monk from India, who continued the line of teaching practiced by the Buddha himself, namely, attaining the ocean of enlightenment by pointing directly at the mind. That approach leads to the region of enlightenment without detour: It is the core of Buddhism generally and the marrow of Buddhism in China. The Pure Land sect continues to benefit numberless practitioners and in that respect it is second to none. For this reason it will be dealt with in greater detail in the chapters that follow. Although Buddhism in China may have appeared to flounder at times, it has never lost its vitality and structure. If more people would open their minds to the Buddha's teaching, the three major traditions might form a partnership and together propagate the enlightening practice.

Part Two:

THE PURE LAND SECT

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***Faith is the basis of the path, the mother of virtues,
Nourishing and growing all good ways ...
Faith can increase knowledge and virtue;
Faith can assure arrival at enlightenment.***

The Avatamsaka Sutra

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PREFACE #1

Elder Master Yin Kuang

The Dharma of Pure Land can assist people of three different potentials to attain liberation, and may be accepted and upheld by practitioners independent of their mental capacities. However, the Pure Land practice is more relevant to the laity. Lay people have to make a living or take care of their families and it is not easy for them to find the time needed for the study of sutras or for the practice of Ch'an; only the method of reciting 'Buddha' can harmonize both with the theory and with the potential. Those reciting "Amida Buddha" sincerely and single-mindedly until their obstacles and karma have come to a halt will see their original face the way it was before they were born, and the true nature of Tathagata Garbha. Between now and the end of this life, the superior class must be attained in the Pure land in the West. Perhaps the practitioner cannot bring his/her karma to a halt and cannot abandon attachment because of some inferior root. Assisted by the Buddha and supported by true faith and a sincere vow the adept can elicit the Tao of Bodhi and obtain rebirth in Pure Land regardless of his/her karma. The wonderful Dharma of Pure Land is like this. A Ch'an adept who studies the teachings but does not understand the meaning and has not relinquished the obstacles of ignorance and karma must be reborn in the cycle of birth and death and cannot leave samsara. One should not be presumptuous, lest one be pitied by those countless worldlings who were reborn in the Western Pure Land in spite of their karma. How unfortunate that those who benefit the most are usually average. The clever ones most often quit because they prefer to be self-reliant rather than

surrender to Buddha. That view costs them their liberation; unable to leave the Saha world, they repeatedly return to transmigration. What a pity.

Many sages of antiquity who have followed in the footsteps of the compassionate Buddha advocated Pure Land practice and wrote commentaries to that effect. Translated long ago into classical Chinese, these texts are most difficult to relate due to the language and they are not easy to comprehend by those without previous introduction to the terminology of the ancient masters. Upasaka Lee Yen Chin succeeded in conveying the integral content of Pure Land sutras in this booklet, using idiomatic language; the following ten chapters do not contain a single word originating outside these sutras, or upasaka Lee Yen Chin's own views. This work is viewed as an excellent introduction to Buddhism and therefore it is listed as a library series. Wishing to encourage people to study and practice the Buddhist way, the authorities have decided to reissue this work using large characters, making it accessible to those with impaired vision; I was invited to write the preface, thereby encouraging people to generate the right faith. No more words are needed; all the important meaning is contained in the pages that follow. The dharma of Pure Land is the Dharma Ocean to which all the other dharmas return. Those who believe in this teaching and practice accordingly can attain rebirth in Pure Land in this life: They will enlighten themselves and others, thereby attaining perfect enlightenment. Should anyone have a problem with this statement, that is not my responsibility; it is the responsibility of Shakyamuni Buddha and of Amita Buddha.

Written in the year of Hsin Wei, on June 19.

PREFACE #2

Elder Fan Ku Nung

Some say it is always the best policy to go with the flow, while others say the opposite. The latter stand firm amid adversity, thereby preventing a situation from deteriorating. Quite a contrast, wouldn't you say? All of us human beings partake in this world and therefore each of our actions should aim to benefit all. But how can we follow this teaching, burdened as we are with all the evil karma accumulated during previous existences? Since time immemorial, confused due to our karma, we were reborn over and over again with an impure five-skandha body into this Saha world at the time of the five turbidities. Were we not forewarned, we might be forgiven. However, countless buddhas, bodhisattvas, patriarchs and dharma masters have exhorted, encouraged and taught us expediently to no avail. We do not wish to heed their teachings and we prefer to settle for a place that is inferior. Great Master Ou I said that "sentient beings born in this kalpa of turbidity who do not act in the manner required to cross the three realms with their karma cannot be saved. Sentient beings that suffer from turbidity of view and yet do not recourse to expedient means cannot free themselves. Sentient beings who, afflicted by turbid views, fail to understand that the worldly mind and the buddha-mind are the same and fail to practice accordingly cannot be saved. Sentient beings suffering from the turbidity of living, who do not foster an inclination to Pure Land practice and a dislike for this Saha world, likewise cannot be saved. If such sentient beings do not spend kalpas in diligent practice they have no hope for salvation." It appears that we must not delay any longer if we wish to be reborn in Pure Land. According to the sutras, the Buddha stated that Pure Land teaching will survive the rest of the teachings by one

hundred years. Why cannot we understand the importance of this teaching in the dharma-ending age? Most people prefer the eastern Pure Land to the western because the Saha world is impure. To practice eastern Pure Land means to seek a long life in this world due to attachment. To be reborn in the western Pure Land one must practice by oneself and accept dependence on the Buddha as well. Whoever does not generate the Bodhi-mind cannot be reborn in Pure Land. To the one who asks if this matter can wait, thinking that there is no need to start now, I answer that from the point of the past, the present was once the future. The future is inherent in the present. A year passes like a dream and the awakening takes only a moment. How can there be discussion of "sooner or later". The *Vajracchedika-prajnaparamita-sutra* says that when all sentient beings have been released not one of them has been in fact extinguished. Just allow the Dharma of Pure Land to spread far and wide so all sentient beings can work out their own salvation and let us not worry about who is delivered by whom. Elder Lee Yen Chin's writing is completely integral with Buddhadharmā and with the teachings of the Pure Land sect; it flows and presents the main ideas in a way that is easy to understand. This booklet is going to be included in the library publications series on Buddhism, thus spreading Dharma and converting sentient beings. I wrote these few words to help the world get rid of delusion.

Written in the summer of the year Hsin Wei.

History of Pure Land Sect

Of all the Buddhist sects in China, Pure Land is the most popular. It urges its adherents to generate a vow to be reborn in Buddha's country, namely, in the Western Pure Land. The region is glorified in many of the Mahayana sutras, particularly in those having Pure Land for topic. The *Pratyupanna*, *Pei Hwa*, *Ratnakuta* and several others are sutras that clearly set forth both the significance and the goals of Pure Land practice and therefore should be considered as its sources. In his *Awakening of Faith*, Asvaghosa Bodhisattva recommends recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name and exhorts devotees to seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Nagarjuna Bodhisattva dedicated one chapter and twelve sections to the subject of easy practice, while Vashubandhu Bodhisattva wrote a treatise on rebirth in Pure Land. All above mentioned writings propagate Pure Land.

Pure Land teachings have reached China at the same time as the rest of textual Buddhadharma and the Pure Land practice was initiated by the great Dharma-master Hui Yan during the eastern Chin Dynasty (317-420 A.D.), the first one to practice sincere recitation of the Buddha's name. He established the Lotus Society at Mount Lu in Kiangsi Province, a place that was frequented by numerous Dharma-masters and by renown adherents of confucianism. Hundreds responded to one call. Dharma-masters T'an Luan, Chi Che, Tao Cho, Shan Tao, Chin Liang and Yung Ming subsequently spread the Dharma of Pure Land for the benefit of others as well as their own. Ch'an masters Chang Lu, T'ien I, Yuen Whao, Ta T'ung, Chung Feng, T'ien Ru, Chu Shih and K'ung Ku integrated Pure Land practice with that of their sect. The great master Lien Chih of the Ming Dynasty, who was first introduced to Pure Land by Hsiao Yen Chih, understood its significance and

adopted its practice, feeling that karma purified by those means complements and supports the practice of Ch'an. Dharma masters Ou I, Chih Liu, Hsing An and Meng Tung followed Lien Chih's example and practiced Pure Land.

The *Avatamsaka* sutra, held to be the leading sutra of Mahayana, contains a section dedicated to Samantabhadra Bodhisattva and to his ten Great Vows orientating sentient beings towards rebirth in Pure Land. He should therefore be considered the first patriarch of Pure Land. Initially, the great master Hui Yuan had no intention of establishing a Pure Land sect in China. He merely hoped that people would generate the Great Vow. The popularity of Pure Land steadily increased during the last thousand years despite the fact that it had no structured approach of its own to the teachings. It was not until the Sung Dynasty that the seven Pure Land Patriarchs were selected from among the most celebrated of its masters renowned for their pure motives and great merit. Hsiao Fa Shih of Shih Ming Mountain whose focus was exclusively on Pure Land, selected Hui Yuan, Shan Tao, Cheng Yuan, Fa Chao, Shao K'ang, Yen Shou and Hsing Chang. Subsequently Dharma-master Chih Pan recorded for posterity all information deemed necessary for a well rounded teaching of Pure Land. In the years that followed, additional luminaries have joined the roster, raising the number of Pure Land Patriarchs to eleven. An illustrious disciple Yun Chi voted in the great master Lien Chih; inclusion of Ou I, Hsing An and Chi Wu was motivated by respect for these illustrious forefathers. This feature distinguishes Pure Land from Ch'an; the tradition of the latter was established gradually and required many successive generations to become fully established. The practice of Pure Land aims to save all regardless of potential and therefore it is a blend of wide variety of dharmas. It can be considered the source of all dharmas to which they all return. This also explains the absence of a rigid system.

In Praise of Pure Land

The preceding brief glance at the history of Pure Land school conveyed that Shakyamuni Buddha and Amitabha Buddha were the sources of its teachings; Manjushri and Samantabhadra Bodhisattvas expounded it; Asvaghosa and Nagarjuna imbued the teachings with vigor; Kuang Lu, T'ien Tai, Chin Liang, Yung Ming, Lien Chih and Ou I propagated it. Thousand of years ago countless bodhisattvas searched, found and selected Pure Land, thereby giving all of us the opportunity to end the cycle of birth and death and be reborn (with karma) in the Pure Land in this very life. Pure Land Dharma is both accessible and profound, expedient yet authentic. The attainment that its practice leads to is sudden, complete, perfect and easy. By including the teachings of Ch'an and Vinaya, it surpasses them both. Considering pure land in the context of the Tathagata's teachings, the two following features become apparent: Firstly, there is the adaptability of the teachings to suit a given potential. Since potentials vary, the conditions may be deep or shallow, the teaching should be correspondingly great or small depending on and in harmony with an individual's potential. Pure Land is the only sect that makes liberation accessible to those of all three levels and accommodates both sharp and dull capacities equally well. According to the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the Tathagata spoke the supreme Dharma to forty-one great bodhisattvas soon after his great awakening. The *Avatamsaka*, reputed to be the highest among sutras, closes with a narrative about Sudana, a virtuous youth who, in search of enlightenment, visits fifty three great sages prior to the attainment of his goal. One of his hosts is Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, who teaches Sudana the ten Great Vows so that not only Sudana, but all those present at the time, may obtain rebirth in Pure Land. The Amitabha Sutra recommends that for their practice to be successful, those less

well qualified should use a less demanding method. Their karma probably contains some unwholesome elements, but they surely accumulated some good roots in their previous existences. When life reaches its end and hell appears before their eyes, these people still can be guided by Buddha to rebirth in Pure Land, providing they recite "Buddha Amitabha" [with all their hearts] at least ten times. The *Mahasamgata* sutra reveals that in the Dharma-ending age there will be countless practitioners, but very few will succeed in attaining liberation; they will be able, however, to reverse the round of birth and death by accepting dependency on recitation of the Buddha's name. This teaching can be explained as follows: Upward it aims at bodhisattvahood and the complete and perfect enlightenment; moving downward, it makes attainment possible for those with unwholesome, mundane concerns. We notice how much wider this spectrum is compared to the customary one polarizing the holy and the worldly. Pure Land practice is open to everyone. Had the Buddha not taught this Dharma, by what means would sentient beings end the rounds of birth and death? Some look down on the practice of reciting "Buddha" because it is easy; even the dullest can do it. Such people are advised to take a look at the gathering of the Avatamsaka and those forty Mahasattvas who eradicated their ignorance and saw the true nature of dharmas. All took the original vow, were transformed and all attained buddhahood in a world without a buddha. Although the Avatamsaka (*Hua Yen* in Chinese) realm contains untold buddha-fields or lands, all the participants wish to be reborn in the Western Pure Land since it is the entry to the short route to enlightenment and away from suffering.

Secondly, the Dharma of recitation of the Buddha's name accommodates those practicing the path of self-reliance, eradicating delusion, and attaining truth by bringing the cyclic pattern of birth and death to a halt. Because the teaching of the recitation of the Buddha's name brings the power of Buddha to

the practitioner, anyone who has eradicated delusion can attain buddhahood quickly. Those who have not broken off delusion can likewise be reborn in Pure Land, burdened with karma as they may be. Pure Land practice has benefitted multitudes because it is so easy; yet fully enlightened bodhisattvas can obtain advantage from it as well.

These reasons should make the practice attractive, because it is conducive to great results with small effort and because, though easy, the practice may lead to the highest attainment.

Regarding Choices

The great master Shan Tao said that "If you seek to learn and understand Buddhadharma, you should start with the mundane and proceed from there. As to practice, select the method you feel is best suited for you, stay with it and concentrate on it. This is the only way to obtain real benefit. Any other approach will take you through countless rounds of birth and death for many kalpas to come." Pure Land is adaptable to principle and to potential, both. One can enter the Path through either of the two gates described as follows: The customary one leads to wisdom by means of meditation and self-discipline; eventually delusion is eradicated and truth is attained. The other is the path Pure Land. It consists of holding and reciting the Buddha's name and surrendering to the Buddha's compassion; combined, the two features lead a practitioner to rebirth in Pure Land. It is called the particular path.

By analogy, to paint a landscape requires countless brushstrokes whereby the paint is applied one stroke at a time. By that method the painting is developed and completed. Using a camera, one glance and one click of the camera replace the glances and the brushstrokes typical of the painting process.

Using another example, one needs many steps when walking to one's destination, but the use of a vehicle reduces considerably the time and energy needed to complete one's journey. I would like to mention at this time the manner in which teachings are assimilated as confirmed by saints. The first stage is holding the teachings; the second is cultivation and the third, complete understanding. There is no further need of study thereafter. The teachings should encompass and illumine all dharmas excluding none. In the practice of Ch'an, the adept must pass through three gates; without this structure the practice turns into blind or aimless activity and he/she is bound to fall into a pit.

One of the essential scriptures of the Pure Land school is called the *Amitabha Sutra*, and contains teaching not requested by an audience. The first sentence runs as follows: "To the West from here, beyond millions of buddhalands, there is a world named Utmost Joy, where the Buddha named Amida is preaching now". Whoever wishes to be reborn in the western Pure Land should vow to that effect, and from then on recite sincerely and without interruption the Buddha's name to fulfill his/her vow. In that region one's own buddha-mind can be perceived in the same way the sravaks and other great sages perceived it. It is a view held by the Buddha himself, and therefore we should entrust ourselves to it and adopt it for our own.

It is no longer necessary to seek another way. The standard method is rooted in the three studies, namely discipline, meditation and wisdom. Discipline is required to sustain meditation, meditation fosters wisdom and wisdom severs ignorance and delusory views that deceive consciousness. That method is clear cut, but there have been concerns about back-sliding in cases where those of inferior capacities could not overcome their limitations. The Pure Land practice is different because it relies on an "other-power," which assists

practitioners in overcoming their problems with practice. With Amitabha's help they can be reborn in the western Pure Land. Whoever follows the customary approach to practice is expected to relinquish delusory thought patterns and failing that cannot leave this Saha world where saints and villains dwell side by side. The Pure Land sect advocates the view that relinquishing delusions and acquiring wisdom are not necessary prerequisites for liberation from the three realms. Those reborn in the western Pure Land have broken off their root of birth and death forever. When practicing according to Pure Land teachings, the adherents do not seek enlightenment nor wisdom, nor do they relinquish their delusions. It is a direct and easy practice. It is my sincere conviction that we are not able to become buddhas at present, and there is neither the evidence of evil karma being eradicated, nor the assurance that it will not be produced again in the future. Concentrating on practice according to Pure Land and surrendering to the Buddha's compassion leads to rebirth in Pure Land with one's karma, whatever it may be. The other option may mean further rounds in the six realms, in the three ways. We ought to give some thought to our last moments and to the liberation from birth and death. How can we avoid facing past evil karma in our last moments? If we cannot exit the rounds of birth and death in this very life, when will we have another chance? In the three unhappy realms there are no guarantees regarding our defilements. If we can come to understand by means of our faith and resolve to practice, we would be drawing benefit from this great opportunity. Do not be swayed by pride; it might mean sinking into the ocean of suffering till the end of time. It should be clearly understood that the goal of Buddhadharma is to end the cycle of birth and death; we cannot succeed if our practice is perfunctory and that would be a great pity.

Principle and Action

Those able to understand both Ch'an and Pure Land planted good roots in their previous lives. Such persons do not cling to principle while refraining from action nor do they seek principle that is removed from action. They perceive them both as propensities of mind; being completely free from doubt in that respect, there is no further need to be prodded by others. Due to their understanding, such persons are in position to determine their rebirth in the uppermost tier of Pure Land, in the golden lotus.

There is a fair amount of talk about the principle, but it is mostly superficial and as soon as someone attempts to explain this matter at some depth, little or no effort is made to comprehend and there are usually no signs of faith being generated. While giving a lecture, I have been frequently asked peripheral questions before I had the chance to broach the topic. One of the sages from antiquity commented that "Pure Land is one's own mind, Amitabha one's own nature." Pure Land is not outside one's own mind and Amitabha is not outside one's own nature, which is both principle and action. They are the perfect manifestation of nature and form. People who have never met someone truly attained may become confused when they meet someone who claims there is no Pure Land and no Amitabha outside one's own mind and one's own nature and there is no need to search further. Whoever clings to his/her own views in such manner and does not hold Pure Land and Amitabha as truly existing neither understands Ch'an nor Pure Land.

Some people believe in Pure Land but practice Ch'an in hope of becoming enlightened; there is no need for rebirth in Pure Land or to see Amitabha then, they feel. Mind is identical with its domain and vice versa; there is no other option. Being interchangeable, the two are inseparable. There

is no contradiction in reciting "Buddha" or "mind" and whoever has a problem with that has fallen into duality. We have to understand the nature of mind as single thought, as unobstructed as space, transcending time. When thought is firmly anchored on Amitabha, it reaches out in the ten directions, and when mouth recites Amitabha's name at the same time, the resultant person and the dependent condition become one. Reciting "Buddha" with a focussed mind enables the practitioner to see the Buddha and to become buddha, transcending time. While seeking rebirth in Pure Land, the practitioner is converting sentient beings because in reality there is no front or back; mind is both buddha and sentient beings. When we say the mind is Amitabha, then he holds all sentient beings in his mind; mind as sentient beings beholds Amitabha, thereby becoming unified. Manifestations of Pure Land take place in one's mind. At such time, the manifestations of one's mind become the manifestations of buddha; my mind is buddha-mind and buddha-mind is my mind: There is just one, undifferentiated substance. The mind of sentient beings is their Amitabha mind, Amitabha being a projection of the sentient beings' minds. How could Amitabha dwell in the minds of sentient beings and not have sentient beings dwell in his?

When we use our original buddha-mind for the recitation of "Buddha", we cannot not have the mind of the historical Buddha. It sounds complicated but it is easy to believe. If you practice, you will clearly derive benefits from it, and the results will be permanent. Pure Land is just mind, and Amitabha is merely one's own nature, but that does not imply that there is not any Pure Land in the West or that there is no Amitabha and no need to seek rebirth. Neither does it disclose mind and self-nature as the only conditions of birth and death. We must understand that to seek buddha is to seek one's own mind. When seeking one's own mind, one is seeking buddha.

Understanding that mind has the propensity to become Pure Land does not mean being there; knowing that Amitabha is one's own self-nature does not imply knowing Amitabha. But people do not realize it is not enough to think about these matters. A partial understanding of the doctrine is onesided and inevitably results in problems.

In Pure Land, attachment resulting from greed does not arise, nor do the remaining two poisons, namely anger and ignorance. This raises the question whether one can be without all that. Think about clothes or food and clothes or food come; but suppose they do not come: Feeling hungry and dejected, you quickly realize Pure Land is not merely a matter of mind or imagination. Amitabha has the potential of untold blessings and the power to make the world tremble: Hell can change into a lotus under his steady gaze as he observes the world. We lack the power to sustain our own existence, let alone to transform hell into a lotus. We have built the walls that separate us from our intuitive insight and now we cannot understand infinity. Some reject western Pure Land in the belief that it stands for birth and death, and choose eastern Pure Land instead; little do they know they chose annihilation. Neither accepting nor rejecting is a mark of an enlightened mind and whoever picks and chooses, though having eradicated delusion, has not attained buddhahood yet.

Sakyamuni Buddha cultivated good causes for an inconceivably long period of time and perfected virtues for just as long. As we follow him on his enlightening path we move up. Simultaneously, we reach in the opposite direction, saving sentient beings, and there is neither a space nor time to be found wherein judgements could be formulated or distinctions made. For the practice of Ch'an accepting and rejecting are both wrong, but for the recitation of the Buddha's name, accepting and rejecting are both right. Ch'an is self-reliant while recitation practice is reliant on a power of the Buddha.

There is much misunderstanding regarding these two methods and at times they are pitted against one another. Non-discriminating mind is the sweet dew of Ch'an. It turns to poison in the recitation of the Buddha's name: This is the key point of that controversy.

In the words of a sage from long ago, "A rebirth in Pure Land means a decision to be reborn; going to Pure Land is not really going." First part of that sentence speaks of action and the second part speaks of principle. They complement each other and jointly bring the combination of principle and action to perfection. This wonderful teaching is unfortunately misunderstood by most and the paradigm of principle and action that it advances is frequently overlooked. Most of those in Pure Land practice engage in the activity but never give thought to the principle. Not understanding that "going to Pure Land" does not mean literally going somewhere, but that the action is in the decision and in the rebirth, they overlook how the action assists the principle. The principle, although different from action, depends on it to manifest itself. Clinging to principle at the expense of action produces an intellectual vacuum, but clinging to action at the expense of principle still makes rebirth in Pure Land possible. This method was devised out of compassion for the uninformed multitude and makes the Buddha's enlightening path accessible to them even if they do not understand its principle. Reciting "Amitabha" does not signify the great enlightenment. Just holding on to the Buddha's name while reciting, caring neither about understanding nor enlightenment, will reduce evil karma. Ch'an adepts should recite the Buddha's name to prevent backsliding and those who have selected Pure Land practice should settle in it and not consider any other. It is essential to establish your faith firmly, recite the Buddha's name holding on to it till it becomes completely familiar and from then on refrain from reciting with your mouth. Continue

with recitation using your mind alone until the Buddha's name becomes permanently entrenched in it. When the Buddha's mind and mind is the Buddha, the Tripitaka, the twelve divisions of the Mahayana Canon and the seventeen hundred supreme koans become manifest. Three thousand revered rules for renunciants and eighty thousand fine actions are included in that instant. Whoever practices this way does not generate greed, hatred and ignorance and that is true discipline. Reciting without thoughts of self, others, right or wrong is cultivation of patience and eliminating all interruptions to the recitation is practicing zeal. If no false thought arises during recitation, this is a sign of correct meditation, and a distancing oneself from confusion when reciting is the mark of wisdom. The great master Lien Chi put it as follows: "One mention of Amitabha includes all of the eight teachings and perfectly accommodates the five sects." (*The five major Buddhist sects in China of his time*). The misunderstanding of recitation of the Buddha's name is rooted in a perception that is shallow, and that is where the problem lies.

Dependent Condition and Resultant Person

All Tathagatas in the ten directions are endowed with the same attributes; why then concentrate on Amitabha to the exclusion of all others, is the question. The first reason is a deep, great vow; the second, a favorable condition in this Saha world; and third, the relation of Amitabha to the teachings. We know the vow is deep and important because Amitabha generated forty-eight great vows prior to his great enlightenment and three of these directly concern sentient beings practicing recitation of the Buddha's name. The three vows are as follows: "If there should be, subsequent to my enlightenment, one sentient being capable of generating buddha-mind, adorned with many kinds of merit who makes

a sincere vow with aspiration to be reborn in western Pure Land; or, upon hearing my name, recites it with a one-pointed mind for one night and day; or, wishing wholeheartedly to be reborn in Pure Land is suffused with sincere faith and joy and recites my name ten-times; if such a sentient being is not reborn in the western Pure Land, I shall not attain buddhahood."

The favorable conditions in Saha world mentioned above are revealed in sutras. The *Sukhavativyuha* sutra says: "...I speak this sutra to let people see the Buddha and his country, namely Pure Land, wherein all virtues can be sought following my final nirvana and to dispel all doubt. When all my teachings have vanished and there is no more Dharma left in the world, one sutra will survive for a hundred years more. Whoever listens to that *Amitabha Sutra* with grateful heart will have all his/her wishes fulfilled, including complete enlightenment... When all sutras have vanished and no Dharma is to be found in the world, the name of Amitabha Buddha will save sentient beings." The reach of these conditions is long, wide and deep. Whoever has faith and recites the name of Amitabha Buddha can enter Pure Land. It does not make any difference if they have heard any Dharma at all; or if they are monks, nuns, laity, men, women, nobility, rich, or poor. Everyone can repeat the Buddha's name, including the one who has never heard any Dharma, the one without faith, the foolish, and the evil one. Whoever finds himself/herself in troubled circumstances or in a dangerous situation can spontaneously recite "Amitabha". Such is the extent of these conditions.

In what way is Pure Land related to this world? According to the view of a wise forefather, there are two methods to regulate sentient beings: Subdue evil and become receptive to good. The holy manifests itself in Pure Land and in the Saha world alike, i.e., in the pure and the impure worlds alike. Due to that feature, the two worlds complement each

other. Suffering makes people surrender to their defilements and generate aversion to this Saha world. Amitabha's land, by contrast, opens one's view on a permanent and irreversible Bliss. Sentient beings are encouraged to dislike this world and yearn for rebirth in Pure Land where the circumstances are happy and enjoyable. Some beings have heard Sakyamuni's teachings but have not succeeded in exiting the three realms and therefore are still around. They can be helped by Amitabha. In that sense this Saha world and Amitabha's western Pure Land are mutually relevant. Amitabha Buddha praises his land and never misses an occasion to urge sentient beings to be reborn in his western paradise. That is a reflection of the relationship of the two worlds to each other and to the teachings as evidenced in certain Mahayana sutras.

These three profound vows are three ample reasons to revere Amitabha. Each glance at this world evidences the untold suffering sentient beings must endure. In Pure Land they are reborn on a lotus and there are no more rebirths. In this Saha world, there is decay and senility, and the old and obsolete is disposed of and replaced by the new or the current. Change rooted in time falling away by degrees, symptomatic of aging, does not exist in Pure Land. In this world, disease is rampant because the four elements are out of control, but in Pure Land the body undergoes transformation, thereby becoming fragrant and clean. Life in Pure Land is eternal and therefore there is no grief due to death. Here a quest for love causes immeasurable suffering because what comes together must separate sooner or later, but in Pure Land there are no personal intimate relationships and consequently no sorrow resulting from loss or separation from the loved one. In this world we have no choice when it comes to people we come into contact with. We cannot avoid those who loathe us any more than we can avoid those we resent. In Pure Land we find ourselves surrounded by the best company and there is no

disharmony due to resentment. In this world we witness many kinds of deprivation, but in Pure Land, clothing, nutriment and treasures abound, waiting to be enjoyed at will. Our worldly bodies are filthy and disgusting and some have organs or parts missing, but in Pure Land all bodies are well formed and all faces are radiant. Here we are caught in the cycle of birth and death but in Pure Land we are forever unborn. Due to transmigration, we must suffer in four evil destinations, to wit: The hells, hungry ghosts, animals and vengeful titans, but Pure Land has not as much as the names of these evil ways. In this Saha world we have hills, ravines, rugged roads, we have dust, rocks, thorns, and dirt everywhere. By contrast, the ground in Pure Land is covered with gold, precious gems are used for trees and buildings. Many kinds of flowers, including the lotus, cover the ground as far as the eye can see. The Buddha left this samsaric world and entered his final nirvana long ago, while Maitreya has not arrived yet, and therefore true Dharma is hard to find. But in Pure Land, the land of ultimate bliss, Amitabha is teaching Dharma now. In this world we can admire Avalokitesvara- (Guan Yin in Chinese) and Mahasthama-Mahasattva by their names, but in Pure Land they both become our close friends. In this world our practice is marked by struggle with a bevy of demons and with heterodox ways, but in Pure Land none of these exist. Corruption, dissipation and temptation seduce and confuse practitioners here, but in Pure Land there is no gender and all exist in its pristine state. Sentient beings in this world are troubled by many goblins, monsters and evil animals but in Pure Land the forests, rivers, lakes and birds speak the wonderful Dharma. There is much more to compare but we cannot go into it in any further detail. The few comparisons show the contrast between the two worlds.

Pure Land is a wonderful region ready to receive all sentient beings and to provide them with the opportunity

to purify their mind. Our practice is improved and strengthened by surpassing local conditions, and therefore it is particularly important to recommend Pure Land and emphasize its importance. There is one point I would like to make clear: Rebirth in Pure Land does not mean to become a buddha, but it enables one to stay in the proximity of the Buddha, to live unencumbered till the attainment of Bodhi. We all know how short is life on this earth and that we spend more than one half of it playing and/or sleeping. Furthermore, we have been confused through perpetual rebirths. Let us ask ourselves what can we do to remain confident in view of the fact that we have not reached the stage of enlightenment yet. For this reason alone we should seek rebirth in the western Pure Land.

Generating True Faith

The Dharma of recitation of the Buddha's name requires strong determination, faith, Vow and action. Whoever has these three guide his/her practice can be reborn in Pure Land. Faith without a vow equals no faith. Vow without action equals no vow. Action without resolve equals no action; it also indicates that the vow is not sincere. A vow that is not sincere suggests lack of true faith. A sincere vow reveals true faith and vice versa. Whenever the vow is sincere, the action is diligent. Whoever practices in this manner can be reborn in Pure Land and see Amitabha, thereby eradicating all karma accumulated during previous existences since time immemorial. The importance of true or genuine faith cannot be overemphasized. One of the essential sutras says that "Faith can be compared to a pair of hands; they enable you to help yourself to a treasure, but without them it is impossible." Similarly, the *Great Wisdom Sutra* comments that "Buddhadharma can be entered with pure faith; this cannot be done without it." Wang Chung Hui asked Young Wu Wei how uninterrupted recitation of the Buddha's

name can be accomplished and Young Wu Wai answered that to maintain true faith and never to doubt again is what is meant by uninterrupted practice. That reply made Wang Chu Hui very happy. He returned to Yung Wu Wei for lessons in practice and eventually Wang Chung Hui obtained rebirth in Pure Land: To attain it, it is not necessary to be enlightened. When one is supported by deep faith and sincere practice, success is assured. Pure Land teaching has wide scope and at the same time it is simple and easy to practice. But to have faith is difficult for those without good root developed in their previous lives. In spite of exhortations from all buddhas, especially from Sakyamuni Buddha, many people go on doubting. Not just those who belong to the smart set, but some who have taken the vows and are well read have doubts as well. Intellectuals are usually unable to have faith. among them some sravakas and prati-eka-buddhas who have attained truth and brought their karma to a halt. This Dharma is the truth of the enlightened arising simultaneously with mind, thus allowing cause and its fruit to be manifest simultaneously. It is within the domain of buddhas, who comprehend exhaustively this profound teaching of the inconceivable.

In the Buddha's time there were two bodhisattvas, namely Manjushri Bodhisattva and Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, who generated the vow of rebirth in western Pure Land. They were followed later by Asvaghosa and Nagarjuna in India, and still later in China by Chih Che and Yung Ming who likewise made the vow to be reborn in Amitabha's land of bliss. Had they been of dull capacities, they could not have done this. According to the *Maharatnakuta* sutra, the World Honored One urged his father the King Suddhodana and sixty thousand members of his (Sakya) clan to seek rebirth in Pure Land. It would not be reasonable to think that all of them were of dull capacity. If we deeply believe in this teaching, it means placing our worldly mind amidst the ocean of great enlightenment.

With a modest amount of wisdom we can make the wonderful Dharma appear in all its radiance. Although it is worldly, this teaching surpasses the two vehicles. We should understand clearly that all Buddhadharmas are completely free from falsehood. The compassionate Amitabha Tathagata, free from false vows, speaks of recitation of "Buddha" as the cause for rebirth in Pure Land. In response to such a cause, the effect in the form of Amitabha in the western Pure Land will surely become manifest. We should not have the slightest doubt that we reap as we sow. Just as sound meeting a barrier produces echo and form obstructing light produces shadow, the effect confirms its cause; without a cause there can be no effect. There is no need to consult with others; it is something we know. When I sometimes think about my friends and about all the wealth in the world, I realize that a hundred years from now it will all have disappeared. Those flourishing in the heavens are going to vanish in a thousand years, but whoever is reborn in western Pure Land has an infinite life. The method is simple: Just recite "Amitabha". It is the most advantageous opportunity by far. Please do not delay any further. Establish the mind of recitation, thereby increasing your good root. Consider what is best for you and take good care of yourself.

The Vow

It is said in the *Avatamsaka* sutra that "For the one who is in his/her final moment, all of the organs disperse; family and relatives are far away; wealth and possessions are no longer of any use to him/her; only the great Vow never departs, directing the dying person toward the moment of rebirth in western Pure Land." The vow is generated by faith and faith is realized by the Vow. When both the faith and the Vow are genuine, the right action inevitably follows. When a joyful realm is entered during recitation, it is essential to

continue without interruption, and the same holds true when a defiled state arises. Neither glorious desires nor flaming rings of hot iron around the head should divert the meditator from reciting Amitabha's name; holding on to the great Vow do not succumb even if the suffering seems unendurable. When the predicament is great but the Vow is not relinquished, the suffering becomes somewhat more tolerable; when the hold on the Buddha's name is steadfast, the meditator cannot be defeated by conditions no matter how unfavorable they might be. On the other hand, although the Buddha's name consists of only one word thus making the recitation very easy, those clinging to the Saha world can not accomplish the task of rebirth in western Pure Land. The situation is comparable to that of a sea-going vessel: When the necessary conditions⁴ obtain, the ship proceeds as scheduled, but if there is major obstacle the ship cannot get under way.

Buddhadharma has come to us across great distances both in terms of time and of space. Yet most followers do not understand to this day the core of the doctrine, nor do they know their own minds. Many recite sutras on their birthdays, to entreat favors or to seek protection from the vicissitudes of life, but they postpone self-discipline, vegetarianism and the practice of recitation until age brings them closer to their death. Buddhadharma is limitless; it can accommodate all of their needs and wants, but the worldlings apply the great vehicle towards small goals. Such attitude runs counter the intentions of buddhas and against the truth as promulgated by Buddhadharma. It is comparable to using genuine pearls for ammunition when shooting at starlings. What a waste. Consider a prisoner: Having enjoyed freedom, he/she yearns for it when it is no longer accessible. By contrast, sentient beings inhabit a house of defilement and play in the garden of birth and death, unaware that the enclosing wall is the enclosing Iron Mountain that separates us from our true,

happy home. Whoever understands the joy of Pure Land in the West and compares it with the suffering in this Saha world will want to leave his/her prison. To compare the two realms means to dislike this world and favor Pure Land.

During the recitation, hold your mind focused on Pure Land thought after thought, generating dislike for this Saha world. Step by step, leave your prison, keeping in mind that Pure Land is your home, and gradually your concentration on one thought will strengthen. Thought by thought your mind will become purified until thought becomes no thought. No thought means a mind that is pure. Whenever you are about to enter some unhappy state, remember to return to the Amitabha's name and find release from the situation at hand. Concentration on Amitabha's name helps to control the mind and avoid unnecessary chatter. Those practicing in this fashion, although not out of the Saha world yet, can consider themselves short-term guests; though not yet reborn in Pure Land, they are considered as the realm's honored guests.

Amitabha attained enlightenment by means of his great Vow. My Vow to be reborn in western Pure Land for the sake of all sentient beings emulates his and makes the attainment easy by making it foreseeable. Countless kalpas ago, Amitabha generated forty-eight great vows to save all sentient beings from suffering. He practiced through eons the bodhisattva path, renouncing his kingdom, his family and his body thousands times over. His patient endurance exceeded by far that of any other being and he performed more acts of kindness than anyone else could. He completed the bodhisattva action for the adornment of Pure Land and to attain buddhahood. He transformed his body countless times to guide sentient beings towards rebirth in western Pure Land so that they might see the Buddha. He can save all sentient beings by those means. As I behold the Buddha's image, I consider that he practiced for me. The four purified realms and all the

adornments in the western Pure Land as well as Amitabha's great vows are there for me; he warns me when evil karma arises; supports me when I suffer; looks after me when I am ill; and commiserates with me during my practice to bring about my rebirth in western Pure Land. Through his kindness, the Buddha enables me to free myself from suffering and enter happy states. He provides me with the opportunity to turn around and to continue saving sentient beings until my complete enlightenment.

There was a man called Ying K'o who used to drink excessively but he quit after reading a treatise on rebirth in western Pure Land. He became a vegetarian and sincerely practiced recitation of the Buddha's name. After seven days of sincere practice he received a communication from the Buddha, informing him of his rebirth ten years later. However, Ying K'o wished to leave this Saha world as soon as possible and become a close friend of buddhas and bodhisattvas. The Buddha yielded, causing Ying K'o to be reborn within three days. I am reminded of another example, that of a Ch'an master named Huai Yu who practiced recitation with concentration. One day he saw countless bodhisattvas surround him; one of them carried a silver lotus for Huai Yu to stand on. The Ch'an master wondered why silver and not gold, in view of his lifelong diligence. The silver lotus then disappeared and the Ch'an master applied himself even more diligently to his practice. Twenty days went by and the bodhisattvas returned, only this time they carried a lotus made of gold. Huai Yu died in that instant. Liu I Min recited "Amitabha" in the Tung Lin temple at Mount Lu; once he thought of the Buddha and the Buddha appeared; he fulfilled several Liu I Min's wishes. These stories illustrate the Buddha's great compassion. Whatever the devotee requests, the Buddha provides.

The *Surangama* sutra quotes Mahasthama

Bodhisattva as saying "The Tathagatas in the ten directions have compassion for all living beings and always think of them like a mother who never ceases thinking of her son. If the son runs away her thoughts of him will not bring him back, but if he thinks of her with the same keenness, they will not be separated in spite of passing through transmigrations. Any living being that remembers and thinks of the Buddha is bound to behold him either in the present or in one of the future existences. Such person will not be far from the Buddha and from his expedients and thereby his/her mind will be opened. The Buddha is like a person whose body, perfumed with incense, gives out fragrance. Hence one of his titles is 'Glorified by Fragrance and Light'. From my fundamental cause-ground and with all my thoughts concentrated on the Buddha, I attained the patient endurance of the uncreate. I help living beings of this world to control their thoughts by reciting the Buddha's name so they can reach Pure Land. As the Buddha is presently asking about the best means to attain perfection, I hold that to control the six senses and to attain samadhi nothing can surpass continuous pure thought."

This truth is spoken in all sincerity by a Mahasattva who attained the Buddha-realm through his own effort. When I do not practice the Buddha thinks of me, and when I do recite his name he thinks of me more. Compassionately and with loving kindness he accepts and liberates me thought by thought. Deeply appreciating his grace I am bound to repeat his name diligently. I endured in vain untold suffering through countless kalpas. Presently I wish to be free and therefore I must recite the Buddha's name. There is nothing I can do about the karma accumulated during past existences, but from now on I shall refrain from all karmic action through body, speech and mind. Deeply ashamed of my faults I must recite Amitabha's name. In the very beginning my mind was of the same substance and of the same nature as that

of all buddhas, but while they have attained enlightenment, I have not. I begin now to see and to enlighten the nature of my mind by reciting "Amitabha". He and his vows, I should perceive as a seaworthy boat to carry us to the other shore without sinking into the sea of defilements. If you do not wish to go aboard and reach the other shore safely, there is nothing we can do. We all should make that Vow and seek rebirth in western Pure Land, leaving this shore of suffering for the shore of happiness. It is essential to recite "Amitabha". The great master Ou I said "Whether you are reborn in western Pure Land or not depends entirely on your faith and your Vow; the level of your rebirth depends on the level of your recitation. I have explained faith and Vow as clearly as I could and in the next chapter, I am going to discuss the method of Pure Land practice.

Method of Pure Land Practice

Numerous teachings in various Pure Land sutras describe how to practice. Reciting and holding Amitabha's name is one of them. Contemplating the image of the Buddha and focussing the mind on the realm of Pure Land thereby making it become reality are two out of many ways to attain rebirth in western Pure Land. The easiest and the most popular method of practice is the recitation of Amitabha's name. Holding Amitabha's name in one's mind can become a manifestation of the doctrine and of true reality as well and at such time the realm of Pure Land will reveal its perfection. By simply holding and reciting the Buddha's name, one can attain the true Reality and perceive Pure Land.

The *Amitabha Sutra* is a spontaneous teaching of the World Honored One, who subsequently commented that it is the core of the expedient means, the truth in the Ultimate Truth, and the sudden in the teachings of sudden

enlightenment. Recitation of the Buddha's name can be done silently, in soft voice, in strong voice. Recitation may be spoken or it may be intoned. It is essential to make the recitation continuous, without dozing off. Uninterrupted recitation is referred to as the "Vajra (diamond) recitation", on account of the mind's sharp concentration; it is important not to attach oneself to it. The recitation method is flexible and can be adapted to one's state of mind and to one's physical condition. At times it helps the practitioner to coordinate his/her thought with the sound produced by his/her mouth and the same sound perceived by his/her ear. When the thought and the sound are clear, the hearing will be clear as well, thus warding off distracting thoughts.

Should the mind be scattered to the point where it cannot be controlled by any one of the methods mentioned, a method devised by Dharma master Yin Kuang should be applied. It combines reciting and counting. Each time the Buddha's name is recited, it is added to the preceding one till the number reaches ten, at which point the practitioner starts again and so on. Beads are not used. If this method is too demanding, the practitioner can divide ten into one to five and six to ten or one to three, four to six and seven to ten. The important point is to keep the mind concentrated on recitation. The recitation, the recollection, and the hearing should all be very clear and forestall intruding thoughts. Counting should not exceed ten and the pace of the recitation is for the practitioner to decide. A full day recitation is feasible in this manner. This discipline of the mind helps to reduce the distraction of intruding thoughts and is conducive to peaceful states because it gives the meditator's mental faculty a rest; its effect does not change or weaken even if the Buddha's name is recited twenty thousand times in one day. While the meditator is occupied, the counting can be dispensed with and the recitation can be done in a straightforward manner, but

whenever possible, the practitioner should resume counting. While moving about, he/she should be using beads.

The above method can be applied during walking, standing, sitting or lying down. The only difference when lying down is that the recitation should not be out loud because it is not respectful and furthermore it obstructs breathing. The schedule for practice should be determined individually in accordance with the practitioner's circumstances. It is advisable to include in the daily schedule reading of the *Amitabha Sutra* once, followed by the Rebirth to Pure Land Dharani; after that, the names of Avalokitesvara, Mahasthamaprapta and the rest of Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas of the Pure Land Assembly should be recited ten times. That recitation should be followed by "Parinamana Gatha"(once) and by three prostrations to Amitabha, Avalokitesvara, Mahasthamaprapta and the rest of the Pure Land Assembly; the Three Refuges should conclude this twice-daily devotional ceremony. This should be performed daily in the morning and in the evening. The sutra should be recited at a dignified pace, neither too slowly nor too fast. While reciting the Buddha's name, we should be mindful of enunciating every word; the action should be even and harmonious and the recitation should neither rise nor sink. The Parinamana gatha should be an occasion for generating great Bodhi Vow with utmost sincerity, wishing that all sentient beings be reborn in western Pure Land. One should be careful not to cling but let the mind be as unobstructed as space. If there is anxiety, thoughts regarding worldly matters or a wish to finish quickly, that is not genuine practice. If you feel like reading sutras or reciting mantras, you should do so at other time and reserve your morning and evening sessions for recitation. The image of the Buddha, regardless of what material was used for the making of it, should be approached with the same veneration as if it were the real Buddha. You should bow to it with sincerity every morning and every

evening. At mealtimes you should make an offering to the Buddha first. We should understand that following the Buddha's final nirvana, the image representing him has the propensity to reduce our karma, eradicating our defilements, bringing the cycle of birth and death to a halt and guiding us to the attainment of samadhi, as long as we firmly believe it is the real Buddha. One of our wise forefathers composed a verse that says that "A painting or a statue make the real Buddha appear clearly. Take refuge within yourself because virtues and blessings can still be obtained by oneself alone."

In the Spring, when the weather warms up, when the trees are covered with blossoms, the calm waters appear to reflect the glowing moon more clearly because Spring is the season of hope. Maintain such spirit and always bow in the morning and in the evening because the city of bliss can be entered anytime, anywhere. Whoever can keep company with the Buddha in this manner while walking, standing, sitting and lying down, can accomplish rebirth in western Pure Land easily.

The Buddha hall, or the place reserved for meditation, should be simple and clean. It is best to make offerings to one Buddha and the two Bodhisattvas usually standing at his side. In addition, there should be one sutra book, an incense burner, a table and a chair; there should be enough room for walking meditation. After a completed session the practitioner's mind should be uncluttered: There should be a sense of unity or oneness with the world. The details of one's mundane activities should not be kept in sharp focus; in this manner Tao becomes approachable and the mundane recedes, making room for Pure Land. Time reserved for recitation, once decided upon, should be used for that purpose and regular recitation sessions should be a priority. We have to let go of all that clatters the mind and keep it unencumbered. In our last moment we will be free, at ease, without clinging to children

or loved ones; it will be a moment of greatness. Maintaining one's mind in the recitation mode is essential; if it is for some reason interrupted, the recitation should be taken up again as soon as convenient. Amitabha's name should never be allowed to leave the mind; each repetition of the Buddha's name reconfirms the vow to be reborn in the western Pure Land. Everything that distracts the mind means a waste of time and should be avoided. The recitation should be sustained thought after thought to avoid confusion. Whoever practices like this can be said to have diligent practice of one-pointed mind and action.

The mind of the one who understands that all is Suchness is one with buddha because there is neither the subject/mind nor the object/buddha, distinct and separate. Thus buddha is mind, mind is buddha and there is no buddha outside of mind because there is no mind outside of buddha. As practice matures there comes a time when one realizes that sentient beings are not different from buddha; and when one's own self is not separate from that of others, the dependent condition and resultant person are recognized as identical with one another. We see that all these are equals: The pure and the impure, suffering and joy, likes and dislikes, accepting and rejecting, defilement and Bodhi, birth, death and nirvana. At such time there is no differentiation, only one luminous mind. No effort is necessary, nor any need to force things. As comprehension increases, the Ultimate suddenly and exhaustively aligns with one's own mind and from that moment on, one performs all mundane daily tasks in samadhi. Amusements and anger are unnecessary complications and the presence or absence of disturbance is perceived due to faulty reasoning. Whoever can arrive at twenty-four hours of undifferentiated thought can be said to have a mind unified with principle.

Although action with a one-pointed mind seems

difficult, it is actually easy; the attainment of mind unified with principle is difficult. Whoever can recite "Amitabha" with a one-pointed mind must be reborn in western Pure Land. The upper echelons of Pure Land rebirth are reserved for those whose minds are one with principle. Those who recite the Buddha's name with genuine faith and with sincere Vow, although they may not understand the doctrine, are already purified in body and mind and their rebirth in western Pure Land is certain. The beginner should refrain from sayings such as "Recitation is not a recitation; non-recitation is recitation". It may sound interesting, but if one is not advanced in practice one might cling to these words and become negligent. Some may follow their runaway thoughts and indulge in foolish wisdom and obstinate emptiness. Unenlightened, they slight Pure Land and those who have attained rebirth there. Such people have been misdirected and have nothing to teach us because they are oblivious of the law of karma.

For those learning to meditate and to contemplate the Meditation *Sutra* is a must. In that sutra sixteen approaches to contemplation provide an orderly and gradual entry into meditation. That sutra requires attentive reading, attuned to practice. It explains the mind's potential, the doctrine of mind being buddha and facilitates an understanding of that teaching. If the mind is purified, the Buddha appears; the event is generated by the mind and is not attached to any outside phenomena. Having arrived at this stage the practitioner is encouraged, his/her mind is ready to attain higher levels of concentration and his/her experiencing of the region is deepening and becoming more joyful. The benefit of the doctrine is not clear, may be impatient and seek to make the event happen too quickly. Not only is such an attitude incorrect, it also produces poor results; the Buddha will never respond to such a mind. The great master Shan Tao

commented that "The intelligence and spirit of sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age are adrift. The thoughts of sentient beings are coarse and because the mind region we are speaking of is subtle they cannot bring their meditation to completion." The World Honored One, out of his great compassion, urged devotees to recite without interruption "Amitabha" or "Buddha" and be reborn in western Pure Land. Practitioners should remember their own nature and character and carefully avoid wrong views.

An Incentive to Practice

Recitation of the Buddha's name removes one from the distractions of the Saha world and points one in the direction of western Pure Land; that wonderful Dharma means return to the source and is particularly convenient for lay practitioners. Those who let worldly concerns become predominant in their thinking, cannot reserve the time and energy required for a regular meditation schedule and a sutra study. For them recitation of the Buddha's name is more convenient because it best adapts to their lifestyle and allows them to find Dharma. Apart from the time reserved for recitation, bowing and devotional practice, a silent recitation can be made while dressing, walking, standing, sitting or lying down, at mealtime, at work and in the shower. Whoever sincerely recites the Buddha's name without interruption understands the impermanent nature of all existence. It no longer matters whether one works for oneself or for someone else, whether there is agitation or calmness, whether the circumstances are favorable or adverse or whether one is experiencing suffering or happiness. At work and at play one can continue reciting. One of the sages of antiquity said "Dense bamboo grove does not prevent water from passing through; a high mountain peak is no obstacle for the white clouds flying

by." If you are really concerned about birth and death, you will be reciting the Buddha's name even in your dreams. Someone burdened with a heavy load of conditions can manage to escape the pressure of heavy workload from time to time by reciting the Buddha's name a few times. No matter how busy your schedule is, do not waste a single day by letting it pass without at least ten recitations; the effect is cumulative and brings success. Try to coordinate your breath with "Buddha" or "Amitabha". Ten breaths equal ten recitations; however, do not think about numbers nor about the length of your breath. A longer breath has a calming effect but it is not the goal of this practice. It is to restrain one's mind and therefore it is particularly well suited for pressured, busy people.

Newcomers to practice have usually an undisciplined mind and therefore numerous false thoughts wander in. Such an occurrence is no indication that the method is deficient, and yet some devotees perceive it that way; they fail to understand that thought-patterns accumulated through countless previous existences cannot be eradicated in an instant. Everyone has false thoughts along the path to samadhi. Eradicating stray thoughts as they arise strengthens one's practice and eventually the thoughts will no longer arise. When it seems impossible to restrain the mind, repeating "Amitabha" or "Buddha" is preferable to letting the mind have free reign, because that kind of mind-activity should be viewed as a disease with recitation as the cure. When this disease becomes chronic the medicine is there to cure it, but time is required for the cure to take effect. It will depend on how ingrained the disease is, and cannot produce results suddenly. It is advisable to concentrate on recitation, not letting stray thoughts intrude.

Since we cannot be without thoughts and without conditions, it is best to focus on recitation, and thereby align condition with practice. Every time the Buddha's name is recited untold false thoughts are eradicated, converting the

mundane into the supramundane. Merit-producing thought replaces thoughts resulting from evil karma; the thought that liberates replaces the one that binds. Thoughts of safety and happiness override dangerous thoughts. Use your skill conscientiously and convert every evil thought, thereby purifying all sentient beings. As bad habits recede, radiance of the mind becomes gradually apparent. When the highest stage is attained, the very thought of recitation equals Voidness. It means being on a par with the buddhas. It is stated in one of the Mahayana sutras that each single recitation of the Buddha's name can destroy evil accumulated through cycles of birth and death during countless kalpas." We should not doubt our deep karma. A wise forefather asserted that the only direct way of practice is reciting "Amitabha". Nor should we worry regarding our capacity. Excuses such as being too busy, being poor, or being too young are not acceptable. To say one has to be rich and old to recite the Buddha's name is to intentionally create an unfavorable condition for practice. Ancient Chinese folk wisdom holds the following to be some of the commonest ways by which people waste their lives: Opportunistic competition, striving for promotions, seeking status, corruption, gloating over a few boxes of gold or currency, accumulating mansions, estates, wives and concubines, inconsequential tasks indifferently performed, and gossip.

We may not have had the occasion to participate in opportunistic competitions, but we are still turning on the wheel of birth and death. There is very little sincere practice these days and the matter of life and death is slighted. Due to that attitude, people are in a hurry most of the time and spend their lives without realizing the most important side of it. In spite of occasional fears and times of lament those with worldly concerns lead befuddled lives.

There once lived a monk who urged a Buddhist devotee to enter the practice of reciting the Buddha's name.

The man said that there were three things he wanted to finish first: Bury his parents, marry off his son and his daughter. A short time after that conversation, the lay devotee passed on and the monk, while attending memorial service for his friend, composed the following verse: "When I urged my friend Chan Tsu Liu to recite the Buddha's name, he answered he wanted to bring three things to completion first; too bad Yama did not understand. He caught my friend before he could accomplish those three things". Even though these words are not very deep, they clearly convey a warning that should put everyone on guard. A prisoner on death row has better chance than we do because he knows the time of his death. Between now and his death he can raise immeasurable merit; we have been on the wheel of life, prisoners of three realms. We might die any moment, and we are unprepared for it. Any of us can reach at any moment the time when the next breath will not come-until our next life- and it will make no difference whether we are wealthy, destitute, distinguished or unnoticed; whether we are old, young, men or women. Unless we are ready, we will experience uncontrollable panic upon receiving Yama's invitation.

Most people worry about details but the important matters, such as life and death, are left unattended. Human life should be understood as being between two breaths, and each mind moment as being a lifetime. Having thought this over, one perceives that recitation of the Buddha's name and seeking rebirth in western Pure Land as the highest cause. The present mind is not conditioned by the past or future when one-pointedly concentrating on recitation. It is the mind of nonduality. A practice of such high quality is inevitably followed by rebirth in the upper echelons in western Pure Land. Whoever recites "Amitabha" in true faith and with a genuine Vow for one day is born in Pure Land for that day; reciting the Buddha's name every day helps that person to be

reborn in Pure Land every day and at whatever time the last moment may arrive, that practitioner is reborn in western Pure Land. The teaching of reciting the Buddha's name requires a strong Vow and an unshakable determination to practice. The words of the holy men from the past are good to read but the most important part of this practice is a single-minded recitation, as well as a firm rejection of samsara with its cycle of births and deaths.

There are those who are not sure as to what direction their practice should take, half-believing half-doubting as they recite "Amitabha", read a sutra or take part in devotional ceremonies; they discuss Ch'an as well as fate, good and bad luck and miscellaneous cult practices. They spend great deal of effort achieving nothing and cannot get off the wheel of life. Others study the *Tripitaka* and practice the eighty-four thousand dharmas. It is not important to see one's own nature. The only thing that matters is continuous recitation that does not get lost or interrupted and remains as stable and as dependable as Mount Sumeru; then Pure Land inhabits the mind. Recitation should go on both when one is active and when one is at rest, in happy times as well as in suffering, when one is alive and when dying. One should hold on to Amitabha, seeking rebirth in Pure Land. Such a practitioner does not need to search for Pure Land any further.

A genuine practitioner recites with sincerity even during moments of closest intimacy and when yielding to temptations of the senses; that way he/she is fearless in the realm of birth and death. When recitation gives way to agitation or to happy states, then rebirth in western Pure Land cannot be achieved. When recitation of the Buddha's name is not encroached upon by defiled or happy states, nor by disease and suffering, the last moment will, likewise, be clear; rebirth in western Pure Land will occur by this manner. Continuing practice is important at all times, but in the last moments of

life will be crucial. Previously we idled our time away, but now we can delay no longer. We were confused and vain, but we can no longer afford to remain ignorant or casual. We moved in the wrong direction and now we must change that, aware as we are of the lotus for us to stand on appearing in our last moment. We wonder, confused, through the six paths. The pure and the impure are clear and distinct and we must gain control by means of reciting "Amitabha".

It is a common occurrence that some who practice recitation and are desirous of rebirth in Pure Land have a change of heart, suddenly experiencing love of life and fear of death; one wrong thought and the practitioner is back on the wheel of life for countless kalpas, denying his/her original mind. If you get ill, face honestly and frankly body and mind. Recite wholeheartedly "Buddha" and seek rebirth in the western Pure Land, completely free from doubt. Consider body as suffering, and rebirth in western Pure Land "millions of Buddhalands from here" as immeasurable bliss. It is exactly the same as discarding old clothes; no need to hold them because the new ones are ready. When the last moment approaches, you should let it be known to your family and friends that there is no need for words, even the kind intended to comfort or to encourage; such train of thought is completely misdirected. All present should recite softly "Amitabha" with the patient to help him/her to rebirth in Pure Land. No one should cry, nor should the body and the clothes be disturbed in any way. There is a waiting interval lasting eight hours, counting from the moment the breath has stopped. When eight hours have elapsed the body can be moved. It is believed the consciousness needs that amount of time to separate from the body and until that happens the body has faint capacity to feel. Lamenting and disturbance of any kind would influence adversely the rebirth of the recently departed. It would be inappropriate to rush through the required steps out of

compassion for the departed. There exists literature specializing in these matters; the one I have found very useful is entitled *A Bridge for the Final Moment*.

The Mind to be Cultivated

It is said that whoever wishes to be reborn in the western Pure Land must practice three blessings as follows: First, show filial piety towards one's parents, make offerings to a Dharma master or teacher, uphold appropriate precepts and practice the ten good virtues; second, uphold discipline with dignity; third, generate the Bodhi mind, deeply believing in cause and effect, study the sutras and encourage others to practice recitation of the Buddha's name. The above three blessings are considered pure karma. Show filial piety to one's parents is held most important by Pure Land teachers. Profound gratitude to parents constitutes the field of blessings in this world. The teachings say that making offerings to parents equals making offerings to buddhas and bodhisattvas. According to Buddhist ethics, the following are the ten evil karmas: Taking life of another living being, taking what is not given freely, and adultery are three evil karmas of the body. Lying, deceitful speech, coarse language, and foul language are four evil karmas of the mouth. Covetousness, anger, and perverted views are the evil karmas of the mind. The ten evil karmas are jointly called the ten evils and refraining from the ten evils is called ten virtues. Whenever we practice the ten virtues, our karmas are purified, thereby corresponding with the Pure Land karma.

A seeker of rebirth in western Pure Land should concentrate on recitation of the Buddha's name, uphold the discipline, make offerings and contribute to blessings for the benefit of all the people in this world. The cost and the quantity of these offerings are not relevant. To offer a glass of

water or as little as one cent when circumstances call for such belongs to good conditions and brings the seeker closer to Pure Land. Pure Land should be foremost on his/her mind to make the task of rebirth easy when his/her life approaches the end.

If one's merit is turned toward this world instead of recitation of the Buddha's name, rebirth in the western Pure Land becomes difficult. The great teacher Han Shan constantly advised seekers to guard against increasing their births and deaths while reciting the Buddha's name. While reciting "Amitabha", the devotee should generate Bodhi mind, supported by his/her compassion and his/her bodhisattva Vow and aim to obtain happiness for all sentient beings, helping them to depart from suffering. Such a Vow is known as the Superb Vow. The great teacher Lien Chi said that "By means of the four graces and three existences, all sentient beings follow all buddhas, seeking supreme Bodhi Tao and Dharmadhatu by concentrating on recitation of Amitabha's name; generating ten thousand virtues, they seek to be reborn in western Pure Land... when all required merits are accomplished and sentient beings ascend to the ranks of bodhisattvas, they return to the Saha world while not abandoning western Pure Land, and transform countless bodies into buddha-lands in the ten directions. Equipped with supernatural power they skillfully convert all sentient beings, helping them to depart from suffering, to regain their mind of purity, and to be reborn in western Pure Land. They never backslide. Like space and like defilement, my Vow is without limits. The merit of my vow and of my practice I return to all sentient beings with four graces through three existences. May sentient beings realize Dharmadhatu and accomplish perfection of wisdom."

To end the cycle of birth and death is in the interest of everyone. Sentient beings are of the same original substance as the rest of us now. In our previous existences they may have been our parents or our relatives; they are potential

future buddhas. We can observe how Sakyamuni Buddha and Amitabha have suffered through countless kalpas while they practiced the enlightening path, saved sentient beings and attained complete enlightenment. They appeared in this Saha world so they might teach the profound and subtle Dharma, the abandoning of suffering and finding happiness. The radiance of the Buddha's teaching permeates all the ten directions, guiding seekers to rebirth in the western Pure Land. It is against the aims of all buddhas to recite Amitabha's name just for oneself. It is ungrateful toward all buddhas not to respond to them, inwardly not aligned with one's own original nature. Not attaining the Bodhi Tao moving up, and not benefitting sentient beings moving down. It is impossible then for the good root to mature, difficult to repent for evil karma accumulated through kalpas of gratitude and grudge. Ch'an master Che Wu said "Whoever practices to really end the cycle of birth and death is generating the Bodhi mind. He/she gives rise to deep faith and Vow while holding the name of Amitabha. These few words outline the practice of reciting Buddha's name."

Friends, please remember these words and take care of yourselves. Farewell to you all.

Glossary

Terms are from Sanskrit unless stated otherwise

Amitabha or *Amitayus*--Immeasurable Light and Immeasurable Life; the names reveal two attributes of the same Buddha, expressed in his vow to enlighten all beings in all quarters at all times; ruler of the western Pure Land.

Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi--The incomparable, completely and fully awakened mind; the attribute of buddhas.

Avalokitesvara--A Bodhisattva emblematic of great compassion and for that reason the most important bodhisattva of the Buddhist pantheon.

Bodhi--Perfect knowledge or wisdom by which a person becomes a buddha; the illuminated or enlightened intellect.

Bodhisattva--An enlightened being who "aspires to attain Buddhahood and carries out various altruistic practices in order to achieve that goal." A Bodhisattva is the embodiment of transcendental wisdom (prajna) and compassion (karuna) and his/her every action is skillful or expedient means (upaya).

Dharma--lit., that which upholds; generic term without an exact equivalent in English; it can be interpreted variously as the Buddha's teaching; the law of the universe; the nature of things; any and all phenomena; the real and the unreal. Understood as the teaching of the Enlightened One, it constitutes the second one of the Three Treasures and of the Three Refuges.

Four kinds of Empowerment through gratitude--Gratitude to one's parents; to one's teachers; to the founders of the nation; to one's almsgivers.

Gatha--Metrical part of a sutra; Arya meter.

Iron Mountain--one of the mythical mountains supposed to encircle the earth (Indian mythology).

Kalpa—An immeasurably long period of time that includes the formation, the duration and the dissolution of a universe; often translated as eon.

Karma—lit., “work” or “action”; in Buddhist philosophy it means volitive actions through body, speech and mind; their cumulative force from the past determines our present and our present volitive actions determines our future.

Mahasthama—or Mahasthamaprapta; one of the three holy ones of the western region, he usually stands at Amitabha’s right side.

Nirvana—complete and irreversible liberation from all existence by means of perfect knowledge of truth.

Saha World—our present world that we must endure.

Samantabhadra—one of the key Bodhisattvas of the Mahayana iconography; he is a universal manifestation of the mastery of fundamental law, of sagacity and the flawless practice of all buddhas; usually represented riding a white elephant.

Samsara—this self-perpetuating world; the suffering renewed or extended by the perpetual cycle of rebirth.

Sanskrit or Samskrit-- The learned language of India; the texts of Mahayana Buddhism in its Indian stage were written in Sanskrit.

Self-nature— Seeing into One’s --: a consciousness of self without the thought or definition of self; obscured by mind’s obsessive effort to characterize or define it; cannot be perceive without a special effort.

Skandha—a branch or a component of the human “entity”, namely: Form, sensation or feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness.

Sutra—Lit., a thread; that which like a thread runs through and holds together; in Buddhist terminology the term refers to original texts, as contrasted with commentaries.

Tathagata— “Thus Come One” a name the Buddha

frequently used in reference to himself and to other buddhas; it alludes to the fact that himself had trodden the path, that he knew what he was talking about and was not simply passing information along.

Tathagatagarbha—according to Mahayana teachings, the womb or the source of all things. The compatible as well as the incompatible, the forces of purity and impurity, good, evil and all the other manifestations of existence that arise, are born in Tathagatagarbha.

Three Realms or *Tridhatu*: The desired-world or kamadhatu; the material or form-world or rupadhatu; immaterial or formless world or arupadhatu.

Upasaka—lay devotee who has taken Refuge in the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha); upasika is the equivalent term designating a woman.

Yama—the ruler of the underworld; his golden mirror discloses each person's karma and Yama thereby determines his/her next birth.

AN EXHORTATION TO BE ALERT TO THE DHARMA

BY
GREAT DHARMA MASTER OU I

TRANSLATED BY
DHARMA MASTER LOK TO

EDITED BY
DR. FRANK G. FRENCH

SUTRA TRANSLATION COMMITTEE OF
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INTRODUCTION

In the history of Buddhism, there is a record of very many sages and Dharma masters of great virtue, who thought that in considering the very important matter of life and death it was vital to leave home, generate the Bodhi Mind and seek Supreme Enlightenment. The Great Dharma Master Ou I (1595-1653) was a very famous, high-ranking monk in the Ming Dynasty. When he was twenty-four years old, he began to think that the matter of birth and death was extremely important; so he decided to leave home, lead a tranquil life without worldly desires, and to seek the great way of Bodhi. Furthermore, he understood that to generate and cultivate the Bodhi Mind, one must abandon all desire for fame and wealth and just engage in the action of spreading Dharma for the enlightenment and benefit of all sentient beings. Also, he was aware that one must hold the Discipline, reciting the Buddha's name with total concentration and, by means of one's own Original Nature, understand the original intention of all the Buddhas. To truly transmit and seal the Mind of Buddha, he knew, one must realize the suffering of all other sentient beings as one's own suffering and their happiness as one's own happiness. Finally, he felt that one must take the Great Vow to benefit all people and to secure the prosperity of the Right Dharma and the survival and practice of the Vinaya in the world forever.

Also, Great Dharma Master Ou I realized, in his time, that respect for the Right Dharma was degenerating; therefore, he generated the Right Mind to save the Dharma from being lost. His each and every word comes from the bottom of his heart, and each of his sentences speaks Truth only. He not only alerted all the Buddhists of his own time to be more sincere in their practice and devotion, but also gave instruction to future generations. Even now we read his Dharma words and message and are still reminded to be **alert** everywhere and at all times. In short, if we cannot rid ourselves of defilements, terminate our desires and reduce our ignorance and bad habits, we shall never escape from the Wheel of Birth-and-Death.

Great Dharma Master Ou I once said, "To leave home and seek the Tao of Bodhi, you must generate your True Mind. To make the Buddhists of his time and those of future Sanghas aware, he said, "If one holds the Discipline firmly and sincerely to end the cycle of birth and death, then this holding of the Discipline can lead him to Enlightenment. If one really studies the Sutras and listens to the Dharma sincerely to end the cycle of birth and death, then this studying of the Sutras and listening to the Dharma sincerely can lead one to Enlightenment. If the practicing of Ch'an is really done to end the cycle of birth and death, then this practicing of Ch'an can lead one to Enlightenment. If one sincerely creates blessings to end the cycle of birth and death, then this sincere creating of blessings can lead one to Enlightenment. If one concentrates on and practices Dharma, then one can achieve Enlightenment. If people help and support each other, they can, thereby, also achieve Enlightenment. All of the foregoing holds true because the causal ground is real and sincere."

In contrast, the Master also said, "If one wants to become a Vinaya master merely to hold the Discipline or if one wants to become a Dharma master merely to listen to the Sutras or if one wants to become a Ch'an master merely to investigate and practice Ch'an or if one wants to develop various supernatural powers merely to create blessings for himself, then holding the Discipline, listening to the Sutras, investigating and practicing Ch'an and developing supernatural powers are all activities of the three evil paths." Apropos of this, Great Dharma Master Chih Ch'e, of the T'ien T'ai School, has said, "To generate the Bodhi Mind merely for the benefits of fame and power is the cause that creates the three evil paths." A slight error at the beginning results in a vast mistake at the end. If there is a flaw at one point, the sweet dew will turn into poison. Even now, in modern times, many people receive the rules of ordination, listen to and study the Sutras, investigate and practice Ch'an and create blessings for themselves—all of which they glibly say are done to end the cycle of birth and death. However, many of them do not really feel any suffering in their minds about being bound to the Wheel

of Birth-and-Death. They see only the tiny flame burning their eyebrows, directly in front of them, meanwhile totally neglecting to be concerned about the danger of the conflagration of the birth-and-death condition raging all about them.

Since time without beginning, kalpa after kalpa, we have gone through birth after birth and death after death, and we have suffered many hardships in vain; but now, fortunately, we have become human beings and have become part of the Sangha. However, even though we have already gone through much suffering and encountered many hardships, we still do not want to take the opportunity to reflect. If this is the case, then how are we any different from a group of chattering, mindless swallows fluttering about chaotically in a great hall?

Now, it is almost the end of the year. Very soon it will be the last day of December. If you do not earn and save some money to pay your debts, how, then, will you receive your creditors when they come to collect their due? How can you avoid or resist them? If you have nothing to give them you will be worried, anxious and ill-at-ease. Similarly, at the moment of death—i.e., the last day of December—of a human being, if there is no preparation to pay his moral debts and support himself in this great matter of life and death, then he will surely be in a great flurry of confusion and anxiety. At that time, even if he calls on his father and mother, they will not be able to help him. Then, when all kinds of evil karma suddenly appear in front of him, how can he possibly resist or escape? In this light, I would like to urge all of you, in the great matter of your own birth and death, to understand that it is better to prepare early.

If all people can intuitively comprehend the reality of the cycle of birth and death, then they will be able to look through all the things of the world just as if they were merely flowers in the sky or the moon in water. Thus, they would come to realize that everything in this world is an insubstantial illusion. Nothing is real! So how could they, then, any longer be attached, by love, to the illusory, temporal things of this world?

So please, just hold the Discipline and maintain your concentration while reciting Buddha's name wholeheartedly. Also, look at your own

faults and don't blame others. Finally, but not least important, follow the ancient sages, not some facile, current, fashionable, shallow view. Then wisdom will increase, bloom and flourish. Then the cycle of birth and death will end forever.

DHARMA MASTER LOK TO

Young Men's Buddhist Association of America
Bronx, New York
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THE PREFACE OF GREAT DHARMA MASTER OU I

I bow to the Great Compassionate One, who saves all sentient beings at the end of every kalpa.

I feel that there is enormous suffering at the end of every kalpa chiefly because of the breakdown of monastic discipline. Thus, if I had to develop some method to reduce such suffering, I think that the best method would be the "Vinaya" of the **Tripitaka**. If the "Vinaya" exists and flourishes in the world, then the Right Dharma will survive and thrive forever. The Teaching should not be reduced to mere empty words, and only disciplined practice can assure a complete, genuine result. Due to the power of holding the discipline, one can quickly become a pure Perfect One. Due to the purity of Sila, all Buddha Lands are pure and glorious. Due to the special effects of liberation from desire and grasping, the Sravaka and the Pratyekabuddha stages are attained. Due to the power of good discipline, one can achieve rebirth in the Heaven of Ch'an besides being surpassingly happy as a human being, enjoying fame and receiving many blessings in this present lifetime. All these different fruits result from observing the monastic discipline. They appear to be "different fruits" at present, but ultimately they resolve into the One Vehicle. I vow to spread this surpassingly wonderful Dharma. I vow, also, to save and convert all sentient beings who have nothing to rely on during this long, dark night.

AN EXHORTATION TO BE ALERT TO THE DHARMA

If you really wish to be a sincere bhiksu who successfully holds and fulfills the Discipline, then you must employ an intrepid mind to counter all thoughts of self-indulgence, remembering that time waits for no one; and a chance missed to reduce such thoughts increases the problem a hundredfold. So vow to employ your self-admonishing mind sincerely to overcome all negligent thoughts. If even one small word or pure thought can benefit oneself and others, then be careful to imprint it in your memory. Also, take a profound vow to employ your highest moral mind to reduce and cancel out your negligent mind. Finally, take a vow to follow the ancient masters, and do not seek to follow modern ways, activities and temptations. It is almost impossible to learn the Tao without taking at least one of these three vows.

If one grasps the worldly view, he cannot enter the Tao. If one is arrogant and has bad habits, he cannot seek the Tao. If one does not really understand, but says that he understands, then you cannot speak to him about the Tao. If one lives in idle comfort and is lazy, he cannot learn the Tao. If one believes in individual, separate minds, he cannot ask about the Tao. If one abandons movement and seeks stillness, he cannot cultivate the Tao. If one abandons the Teaching to investigate Ch'an, he cannot attain the Tao. If one depends on words and concepts to explain the deep meaning of the Dharma, he cannot understand the Tao. If one wishes to be hasty and searches for something easy, he cannot be enlightened by the Tao. If one separates the small from the large, he cannot be enlightened by the Tao. If one grasps at the impure, calling it pure, he cannot know the Tao. If one dislikes ordinary, simple things and, instead, has a fondness only for new, special things, he cannot tend toward the Tao. If one likes only the simple and shallow but dislikes the detailed and the profound, he cannot understand the Tao. If one carries out a task in a perfunctory manner and enjoys ease, which goes against the Discipline, he cannot practice the Tao. If one achieves

a little but thinks that is sufficient, he cannot practice the **Tao**. If one has a little understanding but thinks that is sufficient, he cannot attain the **Tao**.

To attain the **Tao**, just transcend worldly concerns, views and temptations. To attain the **Tao**, just remain unassuming and open-minded. To attain the **Tao**, just labor sedulously. To attain the **Tao**, just learn—with good, close teachers—how to comprehend the **Dharma** intuitively and, everywhere, use the Teaching expediently to seal the **Mind**.

From time immemorial, both the phenomenal and the noumenal realms have been completely united, and the spiritual always remains peaceful and pure. Ideally, if one is acquainted with both ancient and modern understanding, remains intrepid, dedicates himself to spiritual progress, thinks profoundly, is completely devoid of worry, and takes a firm vow to dive deeply to the very bottom of the **Dharma Ocean**, then he can truly be known as the **Supramundane Man**.

To be a **bhiksu** is truly an honor and a sign of respect to the **Sangha**. A **bhiksu** has the responsibility to spread **Dharma**. He should transcend any worldly concerns and temptations and assume that view which is vastly different from popular custom; then he need never feel ashamed and will bear the title "**Bhiksu**" with a clear conscience. However, if one still retains his former, pre-monastic attitudes and views, never attempting to change or modify any of his bad habits, then the offense produced by each of his actions is criminal and can be compared to a huge mountain moving dangerously during an eruption or an earthquake. If, even once a day, the wind of **karma** blows away the monk's robe, then his human body becomes clothed in and bound by **karma**, which is just taking the path of suffering. Just one day and one night in the four heavens of the four **Deva Kings** is equal to fifty years of human life. So, what is real or permanent? What is there to be attached to or grasped at with love in this world? If you do not yearn and earnestly try to detach yourself from it and leave it, but would rather accept the consequences of your errors and ignorance by trying to adapt yourself to the world, then your suffering, for as many **kalpas** as there are grains of sand

in the Ganges River, will be endless. If there are any sensitive, courageous men reading my work, how can this awareness not move your hearts?!

If one has arrived at the stage of outstanding insight, then one should develop his own moral character. If one has developed his own moral character, then he should achieve surpassing learning. If one has achieved surpassing learning, then he should, at some time, write a good composition. At present, however, most learning and writing are not outgrowths and expressions of one's moral character. If one's moral character does not develop from the stage of insight, then it is a case of practice being diametrically opposed to what is preached! Alas!! People are inevitably and always moved by custom and habit, and even a wise man cannot escape. If they once experience happiness through their five senses, they then forget the reality of causes and conditions and karma for thousands of kalpas. So if one does not use the Teaching to change his feelings and emotions and does not use his Original Nature to change his bad habits, then how can he possibly open himself to or arrive at the stage of insight so that he can, ultimately, be consistent in his undertaking to create his own composition?

If one does not eliminate bad habits, there is absolutely no way to get free from the Wheel of Birth-and-Death. However, some habits that have influenced and corrupted one's nature for a very long time must first be repented of before they can be eliminated. At the same time, one should always clearly remember that the body is impermanent and that the conditions of the Saha World are false and illusory. One should also be clearly aware that it is very difficult to have birth or rebirth in a human body and that, in addition, it is most difficult to encounter the Buddhadharmā in any particular incarnation. Therefore, if one is not converted and delivered in this present lifetime, he might never, even after a thousand or ten thousand kalpas, have this chance again. So, one must abandon, without hesitation, the distorted, dualistic views of right and wrong, of self and others, of the arrogant belief in an independent self; in addition, the deep attachment to and the love of desires must be abandoned. If one takes

on the responsibility of the Supramundane Dharma of the Tathagata and dedicates himself to the goal of progressive understanding of this Dharma—delighting in, receiving and holding it—then, day by day and month after month, his blessings and wisdom will, naturally, increase.

Nowadays, one type of person who leaves home (becomes a monk), thinking only of himself, may wish to become a Buddhist leader. Such a selfish motivation will, ultimately, be beneficial for neither himself nor the Buddhists he is connected with. Another type of person who leaves home, even though he has no desire to be in the spotlight and even though he may have every opportunity to attain Complete Enlightenment, may not care one iota about generating his Original Mind or achieving the Great Bodhi Tao, having taken many kalpas to create such a problem. Therefore, after taking his ordination, even though he guards against the desire for gain and fame with great fear and caution, he will, nevertheless, after hearing the Sutras, only be able to follow the words and concepts to explain their meaning. Also, even after investigating and learning to practice Ch'an, he will only be able to think of opportune, clever words and concepts to explain it, remaining incapable of awakening his intuitive understanding. If one has this limitation, then he should depart, live in isolation and constantly practice correct meditation. Those who depend only on the words and concepts to explain the Wonderful Dharma of the Sutras, will never comprehend it or achieve genuine, deep understanding. Finally, hovering between belief and doubt, such a person never meditates upon the Dharma in his daily life and, thus, cannot halt his grasping or eliminate his sense of suffering and impermanence.

If anyone claims, in his so-called unsurpassed learning of some Dharma, that he has surpassed the Buddhas and, all at once, appears to be delighted, like a child at play or like a new-born calf that does not fear the tiger, even calling himself a deva, he is clearly cheating himself and the Buddhas. On the other hand, if someone shows proper ambition to awaken his Original Mind and follows it up with good practice but, due to karmic causes, is distracted by

thoughts of fame and wealth that dissuade him from his original intention to devote himself completely to Bodhi practice, then he must watch himself most carefully and encourage himself very intensely.

However, if someone has no desire to push through the gate of fame or to crack open the lock of wealth, is said only to proclaim the Buddhadharmā and benefit all sentient beings and does only good in his daily life, but still has even one iota of negligent mind in an idle or unwatchful moment, then even this iota of selfish negligence will bother him persistently for ten thousand kalpas. Furthermore, even though someone has gone through and can understand the 1,700 kung-ans, can explain the whole of the **Tripitaka** and the twelve divisions of the Buddhist Canon, is able to build a temple like the one at Jetavana and receives disciples like a formless Buddha, but has not yet broken the fetters of the karma of ignorance and consciousness, then all he has apparently achieved is merely a delusion through which he thoroughly deceives and cheats himself.

To respond with compassion and wisdom—this is the Bodhi Mind! After generating this Mind, one can grasp the essence of the Non-Action Discipline. However, it is necessary to examine oneself every twenty-four hours until one, responding thought after thought, attains the Buddha moment by moment. If one continues to hold even a tiny part or jot of the wrong view—this goes against the Bodhisattva Discipline.

There are three kinds of obstacles that wipe out the merit gained by discipline and that beat back, submerge and destroy faith. What are these three obstacles? The first one is **anger**, which can generate defilement from oneself and from others. The second one is **arrogance**, which can create lack of respect for the Sangha. The third one is **negligence**, which can promote a lack of desire to study the Wonderful Dharma. If one has any one of these three obstacles, it can lead him onto an evil path, where he will surely lose his faith.

If a person really desires to find a way to escape from the Wheel of Birth-and-Death and to attain the Supreme Bodhi, he should, first, exert himself to recognize and see through any wrong views he may have recently accumulated from any teaching or through Ch'an. He

should reject all views that puff him up with pride, and he must stop all his bad habits. Also, he should reject all the delusions that are fostered by life and by the desires of the body, avoid all sorts of evil and adverse circumstances and favor only those situations that foster training, discipline and benefit for his moral development. All fame and wealth, music and sexuality, fine food and clothing, presents and flattery, as well as all comfortable circumstances, should be looked upon as poisonous drugs or venomous arrows. Thus, if one holds to the illusion of the body as real, this view should be eliminated by hardship; if one has strong greed and desire, he should be disciplined by suffering; if one has false views and great arrogance, he should encounter the setback of adverse circumstances; and if one has a strong view of personal dignity, he should be modified by having to endure unbearable situations.

The most important thing, however, is to study the Buddhadharmā because, without doubt, the Dharma is the most respected teacher of all the Buddhas, much less all their disciples. Even though surpassing transcendental meaning is the Dharma's real nature, it must be attained through one's own efforts. However, if you do not also depend on certain books and sutras, as if they were fingers pointing to the moon, to express the important method of genuine practice, then how can you ever come to understand the Surpassing Dharma?

Sometimes heterodox people leave home, seeking to escape from the Wheel of Birth-and-Death; but they do not understand the Right Dharma. They may wish to ascend, but they only sink. If they are careless about the Teaching and the Sutras, then, even though they are persistent and dedicate themselves to progress, they will still, finally, become demons.

There is an absurd idea that goes: "Study the Teaching and the Sutras when young and strong. Recite the Buddha's name when old and weak." An example that disproves this view is that of the Patriarch of Parsva, who was eighty years old when he left home to study the **Three Tripitakas** during the day and to practice Ch'an at night and **succeeded**. Furthermore, wouldn't it be most unfortunate for young people not to recite the name of Buddha or for old

people not to study the Sutras? Isn't it most unseemly to think that the Dharma of the Tathagata can be reduced and compared to a prosperous, materialistic business that promises fame and wealth in half a lifetime!

Thus, everyone should understand that if he has heard the Dharma even once, the seed of the Tao has been sown forever. All the Mahasattvas would abandon their bodies completely to seek even half a gatha of the Dharma. He who spreads the Dharma during the present time should just rely entirely on the Patriarchs Kasyapa and Ananda, both of whom have deep compassion on all sentient beings. However, be attentive and be aware! Average people who are negligent and lazy now may have no other chance to hear the name and the words of the Wonderful Dharma for as many kalpas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River.

There are four rules to be observed when reading the **Tripitaka**. The first rule is to comprehend that the original purpose of speaking the Dharma of the Tathagata is to help all sentient beings to escape from the Wheel of Birth-and-Death, that it is not meant just to give pleasure to the ears and eyes, and that each and every word must be fully comprehended by one's own Mind. Correct practice should not be likened to talking about food or counting others' gems.

The second rule is that on the path of learning one should not, in the beginning, be ashamed to learn from those who appear to be one's inferiors. Thus, there is an orderly progress in studying the Teaching of the Tathagata. However, some people have little talent but are very ambitious and anxious to have Sudden Enlightenment. Apropos of such people we can ask the following: If one does not have the ability to suck up a river, how, then, can he reasonably expect to swallow the whole ocean?! He must first read the "Vinaya" of the **Tripitaka** to understand the monastic rules of Buddha's time as well as the importance of the order of the Sangha. Also, he must read the **Four Agamas** and come to understand very clearly the right causes and conditions that will lead him to his goal. Then, if one wishes to know the fundamentals of the three wonderful meditations, he should focus accurately and deeply on methods and techniques

of the T'ien T'ai School to understand the Tathagata's purpose in speaking the Wonderful Dharma and in skillfully teaching people by means of the four siddhanta. These four methods of teaching are the following: (1) mundane or ordinary modes of expression; (2) individual treatment, adapting the Teaching to the capacity of each hearer; (3) diagnostic treatment of their moral diseases; (4) the perfect and highest Truth. Thus, after using the key of the Dharmadhatu to open all kinds of locks to the inconceivable treasures of the Sutras and the Sastras, one can then advance with irresistible force.

The third rule is to read first the **Four-Division Vinaya** with its verses, which is used by bhiksus; then one should read the **Sanghika-Vinaya**, in ten divisions, reciting its rules of fundamental discipline; next one should read the **Mahisasaka-Vinaya**, which details the five divisions of the Law according to that school. Also, one should read the **Sarvastivada-Vinaya**, which lists the disciplinary rules for moral training, and he should read other codes of behavior regulation and monastic discipline. Each of these codes of discipline and practice has been transmitted differently, and each has its full particulars, requiring careful thinking and consideration. One should not hold to just one side or view, denying the others, nor should one doubt both sides; but he should understand all sides for the deepest comprehension. Really, one should never say to himself, "It is not necessary to care about Hinayana Dharma any longer, so abandon it and study only the Supreme Vehicle." Such a view is foolish, heterodox, arrogant and evil, leading anyone holding it to stumble and fall into the deep pit of error and ignorance. Thus, one should not believe in it!

The fourth rule is to read, understand and respect the Sutras, Sastras and Vinayas of both the Mahayana and the Hinayana Schools because each word is important and each sentence expresses the Truth. What kind of Dharma each person is to receive depends on his habits, whether heavy or light, which also determine his method of salvation. Choosing words and thoughts to benefit oneself and others can be compared to the great variety of herbs found on the snowy slopes of an ordinary mountain, where just gathering some medicine to cure one's disease is enough. However, on the Treasure

Mountain, where everything is valuable, one should focus on and take the Precious Mani first. This is the perfect panacea and method to cure all ills and can be examined by your hands and recognized by your eyes.

Originally, all Dharmas were brought together and were thoroughly understood, but obstacles to understanding arose due to illusion and grasping. If one finger is thought to cover a great mountain or a bubble is thought to be the great ocean, then both the mountain and the ocean are lost. Such an illusory idea or perception would not only submerge one's spirit, but also disorient the data of the six consciousnesses. People do not realize that it is not the data of the first six consciousnesses that confuse them. They do not realize that they themselves confuse themselves. This is due to the fact that each sense organ is so swift and very deluded and because the data of each consciousness are numerous and in constant, disordered, chaotic movement.

However, if one carefully analyzes the data and realizes that the data of consciousness have nothing wrong with them, that the organs of perception are not faulty and that consciousness itself never was evil, then it follows that these three things—the data, the organs and consciousness itself—have no real host. Therefore, even if they are brought together how can there be a real Dharma? Nevertheless, from these unreal, false, illusory things, beings try to conceive, shape and grasp a real self, and they develop all sorts of discrimination which involve all sorts of liking and disliking as well as love and hate. It is similar to the effect produced when you rub your eyes and see sky flowers or shooting stars, which appear before you but which are just illusions. If you then attempt to distinguish which of these sky flowers or shooting stars is beautiful and which is ugly, which is large and which is small, you will just compound the illusion and only become more and more confused.

To counter all of this confusion, just detach yourself from the body, the mind and the world. Then transcend the worldly and be like a man who wants to take care of the whole world, but is careless of his own home. Thus, wise eyes peer everywhere and really enjoy

everything.

Because the illusions of the phenomenal world interpenetrate and seize each other, people act not only according to custom but also against custom and even, at times, absolutely and completely against custom. All these actions are just illusions seizing illusions since all is transformed and affected by ignorance. However, all the transformations of the nature of ignorance are, in reality, the Dharma Nature. Because we do not understand this, we, therefore, give rise to like and dislike, to love and hate. If one has a tendency toward Supreme Bodhi, he should neither follow nor reject illusion. Rather, he should understand that illusion is identical with Dharma Nature. It is very sorrowful to be deluded during the long night, but because of this sorrow about one's deluded state, one can then take a vow to separate suffering from the nature of merit. If he can really understand, then he should take a vow to merge only happiness with the nature of merit. If one can truly hold this thought, then all kinds of adverse circumstances—even emotional disturbance—can help him generate the Bodhi Mind. Asvaghosa says the following in his famous sastra **The Awakening of Faith**: "When Bodhisattvas are aware of the time of the Dharma's decline and demise, they then concentrate the Bodhi Mind to protect the Right Dharma. Furthermore, some of them, aware of the suffering of sentient beings, concentrate the Bodhi Mind to save all of them."

All people think about being strong and determined and developing good moral discipline, but most of them depend on conditions outside themselves. All people understand shame, but most of them sink into evil habits. Alas!! It is so difficult to meet a good friend just because there are too many evil conditions. So if you do not try, with determination and courage, to imprint virtue permanently on your mind, how else can you help yourself?

It can be said that man's fear of the mundane is not strong enough and that his fear of the supramundane is not weak enough. If one wants to enter the tasteless Dharma, he must rid himself of all those false thoughts and strong habits he has had since beginningless time. When he gets rid of all those habits, then the nature

of the tasteless will appear. When the nature of the tasteless appears, then the very tasty things of the Three Realms are just tasteless. There was once a monk who, in a dream, met a tiger. He yelled "Help!", woke himself up and observed, "If it were not a dream, I would have been taken by the tiger." Then he regretfully observed, "If I know that everything in the world is really a dream, then why isn't it possible to cry out "Alas!" or "Help!" with great alarm so that all sentient beings in the Three Realms who do not yet know the nature of the tasteless Dharma would suddenly awaken?"

There is only delusion in the world. Life is not permanent. So you should expand your field of vision, become dedicated and diligent, and understand that the body is merely suffering; also, you should not fall into the pit of idle comfort and suffer its poisonous effects. To increase your own ambition and diligence for purification, just do not follow the path of doing something only half well and against the principles; and, in addition, avoid luxury and control your desires. Furthermore, to accumulate merit, just increase your good conduct and sincerity and refrain from leading an excessively comfortable life. To lengthen your life, just desire to attain the great goal of immortality. You should meditate and contemplate with a single thought about the nature of seeing and hearing-viz., that it is originally neither within nor without nor in any other place and is neither existent nor nonexistent. How can you remain confined by a false form or shape if that false form or shape entails birth and death? Thus, if you seek protection or safety from any delusory thing or idea, you cannot achieve the body of immortality because your karma and illusion, just like the shadow moving with its object from one place to another, cannot be separated from one another.

A man of outstanding talent should be aware that the body is composed of the four elements and that it is without self and void. The mind is, also, without self-nature, formless and void, but due to thinking there arises the false birth-and-death view. One should suddenly abandon the six senses and the objects of sensation and concentrate on practicing the Tao. Look to both the Vinaya and the Teaching to manifest the source of Mind-Enlightened Mind-where

all things cease to be all things but where all things are complete.

The supramundane man, who has the intention of becoming a Buddha or a patriarch, takes the Four Universal Vows and the Six Paramitas as if taking an everyday, ordinary, plain meal with the intention of benefitting himself and others. So if you are about to say even one word that will not benefit yourself and others, you should not say it. If you are about to take one step or let one thought arise that will not benefit yourself and others, you should not take that step nor let that thought arise. On the other hand, to do anything which ordinarily benefits your own and others' bodies and minds and which is expedient for spreading Dharma is the highest good, and you must endeavor to do it regardless of the cost in toil and suffering. However, if you only wish to gain illusory fame or illusory wealth by your actions, you cannot possibly consider or declare that to be the Siupramundane Way.

One should come to regret deeply the great events of birth and death and see as unreal all the events and things in the world, which appear to be favorable or adverse. Everything before our eyes is like smoke and clouds or bubbles—just insubstantial, passing and transient. Only by concentrating on and holding to the Discipline and by having sincere repentance and deep and abiding faith in the Three Treasures in one thought (while, at the same time, knowing birth and death as part of the Three Treasures), by looking at one's own errors and never blaming others, by following sages and holy beings and by not being pulled about or knocked off center by any current problem or failing—**then and only then** can faith be solid and wisdom reveal itself day after day, so that one, finally, escapes from the Wheel of Birth-and-Death forever.

When listening to the Dharma, you should employ contemplation and insight; when writing the Dharma, you should understand the meaning. If the meaning is clear, it is neither necessary to offer far-fetched explanations nor to look through a chapter of a sutra or a **sastra to make quotations. It is only necessary to recite and chant** sincerely; and know that when you open the sutra, it is like gazing upon the face of the Buddha and that when you close the sutra,

the text can still be as clearly seen in your mind's eye as if it were open in front of you. In this manner, after one thousand times or after ten thousand times, you will never forget the sutra. After a long period of time, as you become aware that the causes and conditons are becoming deeper and deeper, then, like someone drinking water who knows for himself whether it is hot or cold, you will know my words are not false.

As people talk about birth and death, all of them feel fear and trembling. If people have little care for the problem of birth and death, then it is difficult to let go of everything to make further progress. Why is this so? Because they do not have any real understanding about the suffering of birth and death, they always like, enjoy and cling to the lives of monks and laymen in favorable circumstances; therefore, they do not have any urgent, strong reason to fear suffering in the Three Realms. There is a remedy for this. If you are able, just use the far-seeing Wisdom Eye to look at beginningless transmigration, and try to think about where you came from and where you will go after you die. Before you is the boundless void; all that went before is darkness; and even though your heart is cold, you are still fearful. However, even after depending on the Right Teaching to demonstrate complete liberation and enlightened thought and action, it can be guaranteed that out of ten people who practice five pair of them will, nevertheless, arrive at that stage where they fear that the causal ground is not real and that the eyes of the Tao are blind; or they will become involved in worldly affairs or be misled by a teacher of a heterodox, incorrect Dharma, thereby losing their human bodies ultimately even though they are now clothed in their kasayas. This is why I must sigh and lament the errors of the present era!

Even though one may have great ambition to achieve liberation on his own, he may, nevertheless, still feel the need to locate and study under a person possessing a clear mind and the highest intelligence. If one has great ambition, he should not just strive for empty fame or reputation that only has a good surface appearance. One the contrary, he must generate his Supreme Bodhi Mind and

tirelessly learn all kinds of Dharma. In this Dharma-ending age, it is difficult to distinguish who is competent and who is incompetent or who is right and who is wrong among the great number of teachers available. So we must ask ourselves the following: "How is it now possible to locate a teacher with a clear mind and the highest intelligence?" Then we must answer ourselves as follows: "From this moment on, be self-supporting. Don't be concerned about Tzung or the Teaching; just be concerned about birth and death. Don't be concerned about fame and wealth; just be concerned about the Great Bodhi. Don't be concerned about the superficial aspects of life, arguing constantly about which side is right and which side is wrong. To achieve the right, just abandon the wrong!"

On the other hand, one may possess a clear mind and the highest intelligence, but he may still feel the need to locate near and study under an ambitious teacher whose original and primary purpose is to seek the Supreme Bodhi Mind and who, even though he is clear about what is right and what is wrong, does not give rise to a single thought of love or hate. One should think in the following manner: "He who is good is my teacher. He who is not good I must help to become good even though he is heavily influenced by his environment and surroundings." Thus, we should neither be too involved with those who have bad habits and evil ways, nor, at the same time, should we dislike them. This is the fundamental and most important thing!

The Dharma that teaches the termination of birth and death cannot be understood by clever ideas or by emotional reactions and mixed feelings or by negligence and lack of discipline. The primary requirement in coming to understand the Dharma is to search out your own faults and not to blame others. If you see a virtuous man, seek to emulate him. If you see an evil man, examine yourself. All kinds of Dharma can be understood by the mind, so to be clear about everything, read the Sutras, meditate, and sow **only** the seeds of virtue. If your eyes are not bright or if your faith is not strong and sincere, then reading the Sutras is merely the mechanical work of the mouth and the ears; and any meditation you do will cause you

to fall into a deep pit. Even planting blessings in such a frame of mind will cause you to be reborn into the family of a demon. Thus, even though you engage in the activities of both blessings and wisdom and in the practices of both teaching and meditation but still continue to hold the ego-view of subject and object, then there is no doubt that you will be reborn into the family of an asura. So everyone should regard this Dharma most carefully!

If a person stands on the ground of the Precious Three and if the Supramundane appears, it is the result of good karma from numberless previous kalpas; moreover, such a person has always heard the Right Dharma. Once there was an elderly lay-Buddhist, who had cultivated blessings for fifty years, hoping to become even a lowly cook-monk at a monastery in his next lifetime so he could practice and progress without the distractions of lay-life. However, he could not realize even this humble desire due to his karma and incorrect view. Thus, we must clearly realize that life is short, that even a young person quickly becomes old and that old age leads only to death. Moreover, many people die young, and once breathing stops, they are solitary, without companions, and all the evil karma created during their lives follows them to the next reincarnation. If you know and are clear about this, then why can't you, in your own life, turn away from the delusory dreams of the world and, instead, begin to discipline yourselves, practice meditation and reach for wisdom? To wipe out your false thinking, just reach the Original Source. This is the so-called real sramana stage. Otherwise, one only **appears** to be a venerable member of the Sangha, who has practiced diligently for many kalpas. Therefore, if you are careless and lose your discipline for even one moment, the result will be the loss of all previous gains. This would, indeed, be a great pity!

Sometimes we observe people stealing a moment of leisure from the pressure of a heavy workload to recite poetry, practice calligraphy and to engage in other enjoyable pursuits and pastimes, but they do not take even the tiniest part of a moment to study the discipline and wisdom of the Mahayana Dharma. They may have shown some interest in poetry and calligraphy, but have never had any real interest

in meditation, wisdom and the Buddhadharma. However, even though they have had or shown little or no interest, they still have in them some seeds of the Supreme Bodhi Mind.

If one desires to generate the Supreme Bodhi Mind, he should learn two things: the first is wisdom; the second is expedient compassion. To learn wisdom, it is best to read the Mahayana Sutras with deep understanding of their profound meaning and to meditate upon each word and not fall into the trap of merely chewing wood or counting others' treasure. One should become intimate with a good teacher and good friends, study with concentrated effort and never become conceited about his attainment.

To learn and develop expedient compassion, one must have deep faith in the fact that all sentient beings possess Buddha Nature and that all of them can, ultimately, become Buddha. If one observes some monk or layman doing evil, he should not be disrespectful to him, but should, on the contrary, have sympathy for him, using skillful means to teach him to understand the Dharma.

One who relies on his own practice does not show irreverence to others who do not practice. One who relies on himself to hold the Discipline and to recite the Mahayana Sutras does not slight a person who possesses little or no learning. Furthermore, if you understand some profound meaning, do not despise others who appear to be foolish and shallow. If you can develop mindfulness, do not despise others who only speak with their mouths. If you build a high mountain between yourself and others and hold within yourself feelings of victory and defeat, then, even though you work sedulously in defiance of hardships for your whole life, you will, nevertheless, only attain the asura level; and you will still be far away from the Bodhisattva Tao.

The Three Realms are like a cage in which we have only temporary enjoyment because, finally, everything is impermanent. All sentient beings live together in this cage, and they never think of leaving its confines unless, sometimes, adverse circumstances surrounding them cause thoughts of escape to arise in their minds. Apropos of this condition, the Buddha said, "The eight forms of suf-

fering are, also, eight teachers." This is really true!

Some Buddhadharmas students become discouraged and despondent because their minds are influenced by wealth and fame, so they only play with catch phrases and sayings about voidness; but few of them observe any real practice. However, if one can hold the Discipline and read the Mahayana Sutras while still living in the everyday world, then even if he does not open his Tao Eye, he will, nevertheless, still be admired and praised by all the Buddhas of the three Periods.

You should always depend on some good conditions and circumstances to study, understand, and practice the Dharma. If you do not hold the Discipline and read the Mahayana Sutras, then how can you possibly achieve the Eye of Tao? If most Dharma teachers neglect the **Vinaya** and if most Ch'an masters abandon the Teaching, then who can know whether the one who is most famous may or may not, also, have the most deluded view?

When you begin to study it may not be difficult to show talent, but it may be difficult to have ambition. It may not be difficult to have ambition, but it may be difficult to develop a good, strong personal character. It may not be difficult to develop a good, strong personal character, but it may be difficult to cultivate the Wisdom Eye. Only the cultivation and achievement of the Wisdom Eye cannot be polluted by the ills of the time. Only then can a lasting good, strong personal character be developed and established. Then, when a good, strong personal character is established, ambition will be realized. Finally, when ambition is realized, the man of ability and talent can be useful.

People go as far as the tip of the branch but never arrive at the root—i.e., the Original Source. We know that the fresh flowers of a beautiful spring morning quickly fade, drop and shrivel; but the needles of the pine are always the last to fall—i.e., virtue and honesty last long. So why does a man who has some ambition abandon the Great Vehicle to follow the Small Vehicle? If one wishes to comprehend the Great Tao, it is better to perceive and concentrate on one thought only in the mind's eye—i.e., that thought without self-

nature. If one does not do this, he then mistakes the four elements for his own body and the six conditioned sense data for his own mind. When false thoughts of both body and mind vanish, the Truth manifests itself. After apprehending Truth throughout all Dharmas, then one understands that all is pure and void. With no dust and no shadow, just recover Original Purity! Then the whole universe will manifest itself. However, if one's concentration on a single thought only vanishes, then all things are constantly on his mind and he falls into confusion. I fear that some originally good ambition thus fails miserably and tragically every day.

If a person who seems to be clever is ruined by his own cleverness, he will not be able to recite the name of Buddha nor to be born in the Western Pure Land. On the other hand, some seemingly foolish woman may be able to reject the suffering of this Saha World, deeply desiring and seeking a way to leave it. We should understand, in these two examples, that the clever person is really foolish and that the one who rejects the suffering of this Saha World is really very wise.

It is easy to distinguish good from evil, and you should never confuse yourself about the difference between the two. Therefore, at this point I want to urge you to believe in the Western Pure Land with great determination and to take a vow to observe the Discipline and to practice meritoriously to support the Tao. The Ch'an Master Yung-Ming Yen-Shou, of the Sung Dynasty, said, "Without Ch'an but with Pure Land, everybody can practice, everybody can go. If you see Amita Buddha, there is no need to keep searching for Enlightenment." This is an accepted traditional view. You should not doubt it!

The knowledge and view of the Buddha is the same as the nature of a single thought of all sentient beings. This nature of a single thought is neither within nor without nor in the middle. It is neither controlled by the Three Periods, nor does it belong to the four-line verses. If you do not want to perceive and meditate upon it, but instead mistake the shadows of the six conditioned sense data for your own Mind, then you assume the view of sentient beings. On

the other hand, if you carefully observe that the view of sentient beings is neither within nor without nor in the middle nor in any other place, that it does not belong to the Three Periods and that it is not found in the four-line verses, then you will realize that the view of sentient beings is the same as the view of the Buddha.

However, if you cannot directly believe, you should not give rise to any doubt. Just concentrate on reciting the name of Buddha and observe the Discipline profoundly and carefully. If you hold to the Discipline purely and cleanly and, also, recite the name of Buddha appropriately, then belief will arise quite naturally. This is just the so-called use of different and wise expedencies to help you manifest Supreme Reality. The gatha says, "The view of sentient beings and the view of Buddha are just like the nature of water, which is the same whether it is ice or melted. The power of discipline is like the spring breezes or as bright as the day of Buddha or as strong as the sound of the Yellow River shaking both banks. So don't foolishly and madly go seeking anything outside, for Enlightenment can ever be attained only by strong men."

To get rid of all sorts of bad habits, just do not practice compassion with the three karmic hindrances. If you practice compassion with the three karmic hindrances, that will only generate the ten evils. However, if the ten evils are wiped out, then the ten virtues will appear. Only then is it possible to set up the fundamentals of the Five Vehicles and, thereafter, to seal the Dharma of Reality. Thus, every dharma and every sentient being is seen to be the Tao of Buddha. This is made manifest in the Bodhisattva named Never Disparaging, in the first chapter of the **Lotus Sutra**, who has arrived at the stage of the purification of the six sense organs and sees all dharmas and sentient beings equally and without discrimination as Buddha Nature. Once the sense organs are purified, it is not necessary to read and analyze the Sutras deeply; for if one can really practice compassion, then he will, naturally, enter the stage of the Wisdom of Buddha. On the other hand, without compassion one who increases his learning only increases his arrogance, and with more bad habits he is just more distant from the Tao. Thus, people often

say that they are increasing their learning, but, in reality, they are only intensifying their egos. This is really terrible!

In learning the Tao, it is not difficult to be clever, but it is difficult to be careful. To start one's practice with urgency is not difficult, but to be persistent is difficult. To make one's own way through the world and to correct worldly people are not difficult, but it is difficult to restrain oneself. To work fast and to succeed are not difficult, but it is difficult to remain profoundly patient. To study the Doctrine with understanding is not difficult, but it is difficult to be correct and thorough in your study.

If a person can experience even a slight feeling of the tastelessness of the world, then he can experience a little bit of strength from the Buddhadharma. If he can experience, to some degree, the insecure feeling of living in the Saha World, then he can experience, to some degree, the secure feeling of rebirth in the Pure Land. In this case, only ask your own mind. It is not necessary to ask a teacher, even a teacher who urges people to experience the tastelessness of the world. Just concentrate on and practice the Dharma in order to leave this world. If the scale of a balance sinks down on one side, then the scale of the other side must rise up. This is an axiom no one can change!

All things in the world and outside of it are completed by compassion and patience but are defeated by irascibility and anger. Therefore, a gentleman cultivates his virtue with compassion and informs his feelings with patience. If virtue can be cultivated on earth and in heaven, then all things will, naturally, be in peace and harmony. All bad feelings, all strange and unaccountable disasters will vanish in the bright daylight. Then, quite naturally, purity and perfection come to completeness. If one is self-supporting and depends on his good virtue and great compassion to help and convert all sentient beings, then he is regarded with admiration by everyone. However, if one harbors even a single angry thought, then all obstacles arise. Even just a little anger will create a problem to alter and destroy good intentions. Thus, a kalpa of war comes into being through an accumulation of hatred, almost destroying the world. Because people

do not think and plan beforehand, we are born into a world where it is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid or wipe out violence and destruction.

Learning the good is different from learning the Tao. To learn the good merely generates the false, empty fame of the world, while to learn the Tao creates real benefit beyond the world. Learning the good only takes care of the situation before us here and now, while in learning the Tao understanding should go further—i.e., infinitely far and eternally long for as many kalpas as there are dust-motes in the universe. Really, however, infinite space and distance as well as eternal kalpas, in number as great as all the dust-motes in the universe, are right here in front of us; but the feelings of desire surrounding us cloud our awareness with ignorance, which has lasted for as many kalpas as there are dust-motes. Only the wise man directly perceives his Real Nature in an instant, which neither is born nor dies and which neither comes nor goes. How can you perceive the delusion and suffering of all sentient beings, take a Great Vow to convert all of them and yet grasp and be attached to the ideas of body and world, self and others or continue to be bound by desire? If you really cannot benefit yourself and others, don't try it! However, if you really can benefit yourself and others, then, even though you must go through fire and water, go straight ahead. This **really** learning the Tao and the **genuine** Good.

One who learns the Tao should have fortitude, a gentle manner, great ambition and persistence, carefully practice holding an empty mind, speak honestly, increase his wisdom, store up his blessings and think deeply and clearly. He should serve his superiors sincerely and faithfully, be humble with his subordinates and should yield to his equals. When he is content, he should not seek luxury. When he is not successful, he should not become melancholy. It is far better to refrain from leading an excessively comfortable life than to do good deeds in order to win blessings. To discipline oneself is far better than to be repentant. One should think that his own body is full of suffering and void. He should not follow popular custom, which fosters greed for fine clothes to cover the body. He should take simple

food when hungry and not be greedy for exotic tastes. He should reflect on what he has received from almsgiving and on whatever acts of merit he has performed during previous lifetimes as well as in this present lifetime. He should be aware and be careful of the karma created by body, mouth and mind every twenty-four hours. He should ask himself what is good, what is bad and what is unmentionable. With this awareness, can one digest the four offerings made to a monk—victuals, clothing, bedding and medicine—or not? Thinking in this manner, one comes to feel properly ashamed for his past selfishness; and then, after some self-examination, he can practice and become enlightened quite naturally. Thus by reducing one's bad habits, gradually the light of wisdom will appear, which is, in reality, no other than the clear Pure Mind and the view of Buddha.

If someone asserts that he is spreading Dharma as a representative of the Buddha, but does not have the Great Bodhi Mind, I do not believe him. Also, if someone asserts that he has the Great Bodhi Mind, but has no thought to respond to birth and death, I absolutely cannot believe him. Surely, if one does not forget the view of victory and defeat, he can only achieve the asura realm. If he does not forget the view of fame and wealth, he can only sow the seeds of the three evil ways and become a demon. If one grasps all the things that he has seen and heard as reality, he will be able to abandon these forms and habits only with great difficulty. He does not really understand the Dharma of Tathagata if he does not know what the causes and conditons of the four siddhanta are; and he can only achieve the lower grades of those on the road to liberation, perhaps even falling into the pit of sophistry. The higher such a person rises, the lower the Right Dharma falls. Therefore, whenever I think about this, I always feel pained and cry out in my dreams.

One who is learning the Tao should develop his moral character himself **and** possess experience. One cannot ever have moral character without experience, for that is just the same as being without moral character. On the other hand, if one possesses experience without character, he cannot be independent; and that developing his moral character, he cannot be independent; and that is the same as being without experience. Thus, it is clear that if one

possesses both moral character **and** experience, he, then, will neither be limited by living in the midst of daily life nor changed by current worldly temptations, bad habits and moral failure.

If even someone as dull as Ban-T'o can understand the meaning of only a few words—such as “Shake off the dust!”—and can, thereby, attain the fruit of the sramana stage and generate the power of unhindered discourse, then how much more should one be able to do those things who already understands the meaning of the Doctrine. But, alas!! The decline and disintegration of the Buddhadharma.... I cannot bear to talk about it now! Everything starts to fall after it has reached its zenith; but even adversity, after reaching its extremity, is followed by felicity. The gatha says, “If intense cold strikes not to the bone, then how can plum blossoms fragrant be?” How can a man of fortitude and courage not be moved in his own heart or be ungrateful for his spirit and insight?

The decline and disintegration of the Buddhadharma does not happen in just one day. It must be understood that if the causal ground is false, then the fruit will be distorted. In these times, many people intend to study Buddhadharma, and many of them have great ambition to help and to support Buddhism, such as opening monasteries, building beautiful temples and enlisting many disciples with their bowls and staffs to surround them. One can see so many disciples staying in the cities and towns and in many other different places in or near monasteries and temples, like lesser stars encircling Polaris. However, to begin the study of Buddhadharma with ordinary or worldly things is merely taking care of or decorating the front door of Buddhism, which is the least of all attainments.

Longevity is the foundation of all blessings, and blessings are the foundation of wisdom. If one can just be alert thought after thought, that already is the brightness of wisdom and the source of blessings and longevity. Therefore, if you are one who can think frequently about death, then you will beget the Tao of Mind. If the awareness of both life and death appears right in front of us, how then can we rely on our egos? How then can we cling to the greed of the five desires? How then can we be attached to fame? If we

do not rely on our egos, how can we take anything of worldly value with us? If the ego vanishes, there no longer remains the greed of the five desires, the defilements are surrendered and eliminated, love of false fame disappears and pride can be forsaken. If we know that we can take nothing of worldly value with us, then we shouldn't desperately seek for such things; and even if we already possess such things, then we should abandon **all of them** in order to create blessings. If we can separate ourselves from holding to the view of an individual self with its own possessions and defilements, then we can realize clearly that all sentient beings are future Buddhas. Furthermore, if we can see that all sentient beings are future Buddhas, then we can use all things as offerings to these future Buddhas. Thus, with this in mind, we naturally would not do anything whatsoever to disturb or injure these future Buddhas, and so our blessings will automatically increase, and our longevity will last eternally. On the other hand, if we cannot constantly keep these future Buddhas in mind, then we cannot accumulate blessings and wisdom; and if we cannot accumulate blessings and wisdom, then even if, by luck, we live to be one hundred years old, we shall still, ultimately, die along with the grass and the trees.

We should never envy or admire any literature that obstructs or distracts us from the Right Dharma, nor should we ever practice bad habits—such as greed, jealousy or arrogance—that can only bring harm to us. Furthermore, just do not hold the self to be within, then the self has nothing to rely on Just do not hold others to be outside, then others are not judged to be false. Just think about and look at **your own** foolishness, feel deeply ashamed at **your own** great pride and limited wisdom, and so seek to repent deeply.

Virtuous and kindly friends, it is very difficult to get off the Wheel of Birth-and-Death. I myself left home when I was twenty-four years old. My purpose during this cycle of birth and death was, really, not to grasp any view whatsoever, not to depend on any sort of spirit and not to desire any sort of fame or wealth. However, because I could not seclude and isolate myself, my practice was not perfect. Consequently, encouraged by some friend to achieve worldly success

quickly, I have, for the last thirty years, been deluded too much by false, empty fame, so that, even today, though my hair has become white and my face wrinkled, I still have not freed myself from the Wheel of Birth-and-Death. I am deeply ashamed when I speak about it! Therefore, I dare not say I have attained anything whatsoever or call myself "Patriarch", for that would only be telling a great lie; and I really must not mislead or deceive myself.

Recently, a certain Upasaka Woo asked me to discourse specifically about delivery from the Wheel of Birth-and-Death for both monks and laymen. You might ask, however, whether I, who myself have not yet been delivered from the Wheel of Birth-and-Death, am really qualified to give a discourse to others about it. I am really qualified and can speak to others about it because we are **all** in this ocean of birth and death together, and I have come to understand the real and right path by which to leave or terminate the condition of birth and death. If you really want to transcend birth and death, you should do the following. Firstly, do not have any such intention in your mind, neither grasping nor thinking about it. Secondly, you should not be moved by emotion or hold any view whatsoever. Thirdly, you should not hold any thought whatsoever that is mixed with the desire for fame and wealth. Remember, if you mistake going south for going north, then the more you go forward, the further away you get from your goal. This is not only an ancient, wise saying, but also an immutable law. It is just very difficult to talk to an ignorant person, and even if you try to talk to him, making everything clear and simple, he still cannot understand. You, my virtuous friends, do you still **not** understand?! The Buddha said, "The chance of getting a human body in transmigration is as small as a mote of dust under your fingernail, but the chance of losing your human body is as great as the round earth." Remember, if even one outbreath does not return, then that already is the next life! One might be reborn as a lower being and, even after one thousand lifetimes and hundreds of kalpas, still might not be able to return to a human form. It is even much less easy to regain a human form for those many heterodox teachers who supposedly spread Dharma in this Dharma-ending age and who are

as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges River. They are just the blind leading the blind and leading them all into a pit of fire.

In concluding, I would like to recall the words of Ch'an Master Yung-Ming Yen-Shou, who said "Without Ch'an but with Pure Land, everybody can practice, everybody can go; however, with Ch'an but without Pure Land, most people, in their practice, take the wrong path." The Great Dharma Master Han Shan has said, apropos of this same problem, "If Ch'an is practiced without Pure Land, not only ten out of nine persons will go wrong, but maybe even eleven will go wrong." These are true and honest words, and I sincerely hope that none of you, my virtuous friends, will ever fall out of your right minds into this trap. To avoid this, you must, first, remember that everything in this world is impermanent. Then you should have strong faith and vow to recite the Buddha's name, seeking to be reborn in the Pure Land. After all, if you do not desire and try to gain deliverance from your bodies in this lifetime, then in which lifetime can you be delivered?

GLOSSARY

- Agama:** **The Agamas**, a collection of doctrines, the general name for the Hinayana scriptures; also means the home or collecting-place of the law or truth; the peerless law; the ultimate absolute truth. The **Four Agamas** are as follows: (1) Dirghagama, "law" treatises on cosmogony; (2) Madhyamagama, "middle" treatises on metaphysics; (3) Samyuktagama, "miscellaneous" treatises on abstract contemplation; (4) Edottaragama, "numerical" treatises on subjects treated numerically.
- Asura:** Titanic demons, enemies of the gods, with whom—especially Indra—they wage war.
- Ban T'o:** In Sanskrit, his name was Suddhidanthaka. Ban T'o was a disciple of Buddha, and he was very forgetful; for when the Buddha taught him the second sentence of a gatha of a sutra he would forget the first one, and when he was taught the third one he would forget the second one. Ultimately, however, with persistence he became an Arhat.
- Bhiksu:** A fully ordained Buddhist monk.
- Bodhi-Tao:** The way or path to the Supreme Enlightenment of Buddhahood.
- Bodhisattva-Tao:** The way of the practitioner of Mahayana Buddhism. One following this path aspires to the attainment of Enlightenment for the sake and benefit of all sentient beings.
- Ch'an:** The Chinese word for Dhyana or meditation. A sect of Chinese Buddhism founded by Bodhidharma, the twenty-eighth Patriarch. The aim of this sect is instantaneous Enlightenment and the direct pointing at the mind for the perception of Self-Nature and the attainment of Buddhahood.
- Deva:** Lit., "A Shining One", a god, who is, in no sense, a creator and who is neither omniscient nor omnipotent; simply a denizen of another world; any personal god, angel, etc.; e.g., Brahma, Sakra, a heavenly being a deity, etc.

Deva King: The four Deva Kings in the first, or lowest, Devaloka on its four sides are the following: East–Dhrtarastra; South–Virodhaka; West–Viropaksa; North–Dhanada, or Vaisravana.

Dharma: Lit., that which upholds. Dharma has no exact equivalent in English. It can mean variously: Buddha's Teaching, the laws of the universe, the nature of things, any and all phenomena, the real or the unreal, etc. When understood as the Perfect Teaching of the Awakened One, it constitutes the second of the Three Precious Jewels and the Three Refuges.

Four Universal Vows: The Four Great Vows are as follows: (1) Countless sentient beings we vow to enlighten; (2) Vexations without end we vow to eradicate; (3) Approaches to Dharma without limit we vow to follow; (4) Supreme Enlightenment we vow to achieve.

Jetavana: A park near the city of Sravasti, said to have been obtained from Prince Jeta by Anathapindika, in which monasterial buildings were erected; the favorite resort of Sakyamuni.

Kalpa: The period of time between the creation, destruction and re-creation of a world or a universe; aeon.

Karma: Action, causation, the binding force of the universe, which enforces the law of "like cause produces like effect". Karma applies not only to natural phenomena, but, even more importantly, it also applies to moral events. It is, therefore, a metaphysical principle that explains the overall phenomenon of man's world.

Kasaya: The monk's robe, or cassock.

Kung-An: In Japanese, **koan**. A Ch'an (Japanese, Zen) story, a Ch'an problem, a technique of Ch'an practice.

Mani: A jewel, gem, precious stone; especially a pearl, bead or other globular ornament.

Polaris: The North Star, polestar; star of the second magnitude, standing alone and forming the end of the tail of the constellation Ursa Minor; it marks very nearly the position of the north celestial pole.

Pratyeka-Buddha: One who attains his Enlightenment alone, independently of a teacher, and with the object of attaining nirvana and his own salvation rather than that of others, as is the goal of a Bodhisattva.

Sangha: The monastic community of bhiksus and bhiksunis, Buddhist monks and nuns, respectively; more generally, the community of Buddhist believers.

Siddhanta: The four siddhanta. The Buddha taught by (1) mundane or ordinary modes of expression; (2) individual treatment, adapting his teaching to the capacity of his hearers; (3) diagnostic treatment of their moral diseases; and (4) the perfect and highest truth.

Sila: Pure and cool, i.e., chaste. It is the second paramita, moral purity, i.e., of thought, word and deed. The four conditons of sila are chaste, quiet, calm, extinguished, i.e., no longer perturbed by the passions.

Six Organs: The six indriyas, or sense organs: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.

Six Paramitas: The six practices, the perfection of which ferries one beyond the sea of suffering and mortality to nirvana; the six perfections of a Bodhisattva. The six paramitas are the following: (1) Dana, charity or giving, including the bestowing of truth on others; (2) Sila, keeping the discipline; (3) Ksanti, patience under suffering and insult; (4) Virya, zeal and progress; (5) Dhyana, meditation or contemplation; (6) Prajna, wisdom, the power to discern reality or truth. It is the perfection of the last one—Prajna—that ferries sentient beings across the ocean of samsara (the sea of incarnate life) to the shores of nirvana.

Sramana: An ascetic or a Buddhist monk who has left his family and has detached himself from the worldly passions.

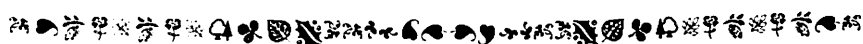
Sravaka: Disciple of the Buddha; a "hearer"; a disciple not yet capable of independent progress; one who hears and follows the teachings of the Buddha. In Mahayana texts, a technical term for the followers of the Hinayana doctrine.

- Sutra:** An aphorism; a thread of suggestive words or phrases; compact mnemonic phrases summarizing religious and philosophical instruction. Also, addresses attributed to the Buddha, usually introduced by the phrase "Thus have I heard." Also refers to the **Sutra-Pitaka** or first portion of the **Tripitaka**, the Buddhist Canon, but the term is sometimes applied to the whole collection.
- Tao:** Road, way, path doctrine, truth, Self-Nature, the Absolute; also, the absolutist philosophy of the Chinese philosopher Lao-Tse; the term "Tao" has a connotation similar to that of Nirvana and Brahman.
- Tathagata:** In Chinese, Ru-Lai, the "thus come one"; it has a distant resemblance to the concept of the Messiah, but means one who has arrived according to the norm, one who has attained the goal of Enlightenment. It is the highest of a Buddha's titles.
- Ten Evils:** The ten 'not right' or evil things are killing, stealing, adultery, lying, double-tongue, coarse language, filthy language, covetousness, anger and perverted views. These all produce the ten resultant evils.
- Three Karmas:** The three conditons, inheritances or karmas, of which there are several groups, including the karmas of deeds, words and thoughts.
- Three Treasures:** In Sanskrit, Rathatraya. The Three Treasures are the Buddha, the Law or Teaching of the Buddha, and the Sangha, or monastic community.
- Tripitaka:** The "Three Baskets", or Canon of Buddhist Scriptures, which contains the Sutras, the Vinaya and the Sastras.
- Upasaka:** A male lay devotee of Buddhism; one who takes the five precepts.
- Vinaya:** From Vi-ni, to lead, train; discipline. Other names are pratimoksa, sila and upalaksa. The discipline, or monastic rules; one of the three divisions of the Canon, or **Tripitaka**, and said to have been compiled by Upali.

*“Wherever the Buddha’s teachings have
 flourished,
 either in cities or countrysides,
 people would gain inconceivable benefits.
 The land and people would be enveloped in peace.
 The sun and moon will shine clear and bright.
 Wind and rain would appear accordingly,
 and there will be no disasters.
 Nations would be prosperous
 and there would be no use for soldiers or weapons.
 People would abide by morality and accord with
 laws.
 They would be courteous and humble,
 and everyone would be content without injustices.
 There would be no thefts or violence.
 The strong would not dominate the weak
 and everyone would get their fair share.”*

**❧ THE BUDDHA SPEAKS OF
 THE INFINITE LIFE SUTRA OF
 ADORNMENT, PURITY, EQUALITY
 AND ENLIGHTENMENT OF
 THE MAHAYANA SCHOOL ❧**

The Teachings Of Great Master Yin Guang



Whether one is a layperson or has left the home-life, one should respect elders and be harmonious to those surrounding him. One should endure what others cannot, and practice what others cannot achieve. One should take others' difficulties unto oneself and help them succeed in their undertakings. While sitting quietly, one should often reflect upon one's own faults, and when chatting with friends, one should not discuss the rights and wrongs of others. In every action one makes, whether dressing or eating, from dawn to dusk and dusk till dawn, one should not cease to recite the AMITABHA Buddha's name. Aside from Buddha recitation, whether reciting quietly or silently, one should not give rise to other improper thoughts. If wandering thoughts appear, one should immediately dismiss them. Constantly maintain a humble and repentful heart; even if one has upheld true cultivation, one should still feel one's practice is shallow and never boast. One should mind one's own business and not the business of others. Only look after the good examples of others instead of bad ones. One should see oneself as mundane and everyone else as Bodhisattvas. If one can cultivate according to these teachings, one is sure to reach the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Homage to Amitabha! Amitabha!

A Path to True Happiness



TRUE SINCERITY

towards others

PURITY OF MIND

within

EQUALITY

in everything we see

PROPER UNDERSTANDING

of ourselves and our environment

COMPASSION

by helping others in a wise, unemotional and unconditional way



SEE THROUGH

to the truth of impermanence

LET GO

of all wandering thoughts and attachments

ATTAIN FREEDOM

of mind and spirit

ACCORD WITH CONDITIONS

to go along with the environment

BE MINDFUL OF AMITABHA BUDDHA

following his teachings and vowing to reach the Pure Land

□ From The Teachings of
Ven. Master Chin Kung

With bad advisors forever left behind,
From paths of evil he departs for eternity,
Soon to see the Buddha of Limitless Light
And perfect Samantabhadra's Supreme Vows.

The supreme and endless blessings
of Samantabhadra's deeds,
I now universally transfer.
May every living being, drowning and adrift,
Soon return to the Pure Land of
Limitless Light!

~The Vows of Samantabhadra~

I vow that when my life approaches its end,
All obstructions will be swept away;
I will see Amitabha Buddha,
And be born in His Western Pure Land of
Ultimate Bliss and Peace.

When reborn in the Western Pure Land,
I will perfect and completely fulfill
Without exception these Great Vows,
To delight and benefit all beings.

~The Vows of Samantabhadra
Avatamsaka Sutra~

DEDICATION OF MERIT



May the merit and virtue
accrued from this work
adorn Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land,
repay the four great kindnesses above,
and relieve the suffering of
those on the three paths below.

May those who see or hear of these efforts
generate Bodhi-mind,
spend their lives devoted to the Buddha Dharma,
and finally be reborn together in
the Land of Ultimate Bliss.
Homage to Amita Buddha!

NAMO AMITABHA

南無阿彌陀佛

財團法人佛陀教育基金會 印贈

台北市杭州南路一段五十五號十一樓

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11F., 55 Hang Chow South Road Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C.

Tel: 886-2-23951198, Fax: 886-2-23913415

Email: overseas@budaedu.org.tw

Website: <http://www.budaedu.org.tw>

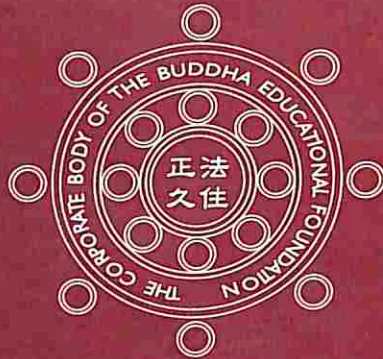
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As this is a Dhamma text,
we request that it be treated with respect.
If you are finished with it,
please pass it on to others or
offer it to a monastery, school or public library.
Thanks for your co-operation.
Namo Amitabha!



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