

Visit by Chairperson of South Africa's NCOP Mr. Mahlangu at Nan Hua Temple on 21 August 2009

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N a n H u a | Dharma Talks

## How to Change Fate

By Grand Master Hsing Yun

What we often care most for in life is the self, and the most important aspect of self is none other than destiny. During one's lifetime, destiny changes frequently because of circumstances that arise. Because of a person, an event, a word, a dollar, or even a thought, entire lives may be altered. Similarly, the development of a country may be changed and the history of humankind may even be re-written.

Britain's Duke of Windsor abdicated his throne in order to be with his beloved, Mrs. Wallis Simpson. In giving up his kingdom for his wife, he changed his life because of a woman and also re-wrote the history of his country. Former U.S. President Richard Nixon lost the most important job in the world over the Watergate scandal. So while our position may bring us high esteem, an event may lead us to shameful humiliation.

Chan Master Danxia of the Tang Dynasty intended to travel to the Chinese capital for the national examinations, but he met a monastic on his way who told him, "It is better to be tested for Buddhahood than for a position as an imperial official." He was awakened from his dream of fame and fortune and opened up a whole new life for himself instead. Henry Ford's father gave him a dollar when he left home to strike out on his own. He used that dollar as capital and eventually built the Ford Motor Company, making a name for himself in history and benefiting all of humankind in the process.

Tang Dynasty's Venerable Master Xuanzang studied the Buddhist scriptures when he was young and felt that the number of sutras translated was insufficient at the time.

He took the initiative to go to India to bring back more sutras. Because of this single thought, he spent eighteen years in India and brought back thousands of volumes of scriptures. He became known as the Master of the Buddhist Canon. His goals changed his life and turned a new page in the development of Chinese Buddhism, history, and culture.

Each person's life is different from the next person's. When we see others flying high while we are down, we inevitably sigh and complain that it is just not the best time in our lives, or even blame the heavens for our ill destiny. But others may take life as it is, thinking that all of life's fortunes are pre-destined.

In reality, our destiny is not controlled by anyone. Destiny is the result of karma, and anything from habit, religion, emotions, power, or desire can affect destiny. Therefore, we need only to cultivate the right view, establish faith in religion, build good connections with people, and strictly observe the precepts, regardless of who the people are, how much money it is, or the situation; then, we will not be controlled by destiny but can instead freely improve our destiny.



## Visit by Chairperson of South Africa's NCOP Mr. Mahlangu at Nan Hua Temple 21<sup>st</sup> Aug 2009

The Temple visit by the NCOP Chairperson was initially arranged by the only Chinese member of parliament, Mrs. Sherry Chen on 21 August 2009. After the visit was organized, the Chairperson asked the Abbot and Temple people to visit his hometown in Limpopo Province. The place that they would visit first would be a center for people with disabilities.

The Abbot, Ven. Hui Fang, Ven. Yi Chun and Mrs. Sherry Chen MP, drove 150 km to small town to meet the NCOP Chairperson and his wife and together they drove to the center for the disabled to hear the briefing from the volunteers. Then everyone returned to the temple, arriving back at 12:00pm. The BLIA Johannesburg chapter Chairman Mrs. Daman Ying, presented a bouquet to Mr. Mahlangu and all the people at Nan Hua Temple gave him a warm welcome.

Ven. Yi Chun welcomed them on behalf of the temple and gave a brief introduction about the temple and BLIA. In conclusion, Venerable Yi Chun asked that Chairman Mahlangu take a DVD of Nan Hua Temple and BLIA to President Zuma and also invite President Zuma to visit the temple. Pretoria BLIA chapter general secretary Chan Kai-Ying was the interpreter. The Abbot presented gifts of books to Mr. Mahlangu.

After Mr. Mahlangu had heard the address, he replied by saying, "I have often driven along the N4 freeway, which is close to the temple, but have never been here before. After this meeting, I understand what the temple is doing for South Africans and I am really moved. I will find an opportunity to report to the President of the country on all that the temple is doing. I hope the temple will carry on working hard for sake of South Africa and that in the future we will have an opportunity to work together."

A delicious vegetarian feast was prepared for Chairman Mahlangu and his wife. During the lunch, Chairman Mahlangu expressed a strong interest in Buddhism and vegetarianism and asked many questions in this regard. The wife of the representative of Taiwan Liaison Office, Mrs. Fu, explained the benefits of being a vegetarian. When the Chairman saw the volunteers under Ms Fang who had worked hard preparing the meal, he praised them and thanked them for their excellent food.

After the meal, Ven. Yi Chun and Ven. Hui Fang led the Chairman to the Chinese Embroidery Exhibition and then they went to the Main Temple, where the Chairman and his wife made light



The Abbot presenting a gift of books to the NCOP Chairperson



In the Bell Tower with Prayers for SA

offering. They then went to the bell tower and struck the bell three times for prayers for South Africa. The chairman also requested to go to the drum tower to see the big drum. Venerable Hui Pei demonstrated the drum and Mr. Mahlangu was delighted to be able to strike the drum as well.

Since the ground-breaking of Nan Hua in 1993, many members of parliament have visited the temple, among them being Ms Sherry Chen who took office for two terms and Mr. Huang Shi Hao who are both devotees of the temple and also members of BLIA. This was NCOP Chairman Mahlangu's first visit.

## The International Buddha's Light Youth Adult Executive Conference



5 executives from the SA YAD BLIA with Master Jui Kai were sent to Japan to attend the International Buddha's Light Youth Adult Executive Conference from the 25 - 29 July 2009. The

Conference is designed to gather the global YAD groups together and to provide a forum where new ideas for the future of YAD can be drafted. The theme of this year's conference was "Bodhisattva and Volunteer".

The topics for discussion were successfully completed, with 7 main topics being discussed with young people from more than 20 countries. The topics were: the YAD organization chart, YAD operation, YAD history, YAD image, YAD networking, YAD conferences and YAD international community service.

Ven. Tzu Jung - depart. head to the secretary of the BLIA world headquarters shared her beliefs, guiding the young people to volunteer with a heart of generosity and righteousness, hoping that the BLIA YAD will bring hope to society.

Great ideas were created by the young people during the conference and these successfully formed the basis of many beneficial proposals which will be presented during the International BLIA Conference.



## BLIA Members of SA in Different Cities Raised Relief Funds for Victims of Typhoon Morakot in Taiwan

23<sup>rd</sup> Aug 2009

On 23 August 2009 BLIA members of Johannesburg went to different shopping malls to persuade people to make charity donation. After SA BLIA members at Nan Hua Temple started activity of 'LOVE TAIWAN – FUNCTION OF RAISING FUNDS FOR VICTIMS OF TYPHOON MORAKOT IN SOUTH TAIWAN' on 10 August 2009, different BLIA Chapters positively mobilized people to make donations. Until 24 August 2009, which is already two weeks, they have collected more than R 55, 000 (fifty five thousand Rand).

Johannesburg BLIA members apart from asking members and friends to donate, Chapter President, Ms De Man, on 23 August 2009 in the morning mobilized people to attend Krishitgarba Dharma function at Pu-Jue Temple and dedicate blessings to victims of Typhoon Morakot in Northern Taiwan. In the afternoon She lead people to Eastern Chinese Mall, China Town and Bai-Jia Mall to persuade people to make relief donation for the victims. BLIA Africa Assistant Secretary General Venerable Yi Chun, Johannesburg guiding master Venerable Yong Xun, Ven. Yong Fu of Pu-Jue Temple and others lead the members to different routes to raise funds. Senior Supervisor of Johannesburg BLIA Chapter Mr. Huang accompanied them as well. On the same day more than forty thousand Rand was donated in Johannesburg and in Durban charity sale was held and collected more than twenty thousand Rand.

After the Dharma function Venerable Yi Chun reported to BLIA members on the circumstance of the relief and how to spread it across the world. She thanked them for opening up their hands for the victims.

Up to 24 August 2009 BLIA Chapters of Johannesburg raised more than two hundred and seventy thousand Rand, Pretoria raised more than thirty thousand Rand, Bloemfontein raised more than thirty thousand Rand, Lesotho raised more than forty thousand Rand, Durban more than eighty thousand Rand, New Castle more than seventy thousand Rand, Cape Town more than twenty thousand Rand. The above figures do not include amount given to embassy, Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan and Taiwan Relief Fund.

The movement of BLIA members of South Africa, 'Love Taiwan – Save victims of disaster' has moved and touched many people. Apart from Chinese, there were many white and black who donated money. Although they were minority but they moved and touched people. It is difficult and not easy for Chinese people in South Africa to make money still are willing to contribute and offer their heart of love. Last year's earthquake in Si-Chuan Province and this year's Typhoon Morakot in Taiwan make us to see clearly the feelings of Chinese people as one blood, not divided by provinces, ocean sides, within the country or abroad, all together minds embracing each other, mutual care, mutual support.

## The 19<sup>th</sup> computer Graduation

14<sup>th</sup> Aug 2009



A colorful graduation ceremony was held at the temple on 14th August 2009. The function was held at the temple's meeting room hosted by our temple

manager, Ven. Hui Xin. Twenty-four students from Dark City-Ekangala and surroundings gathered here to receive their certificate of accomplishment for our two month Basic Computer Course.

In Ven. Hui Xin's address to the audience, he encouraged the participants to continue to look for more opportunities to increase their computer knowledge. Computers are used in all aspects of life and so it is the duty of the graduates to seek out these opportunities and exploit them, in order to benefit themselves, as well as the community in general.

It is very easy to be unhappy and to live unhappily for the rest of one's life if you don't pay attention to things which make you happy. Ven. Hui Xin, gave them an example of the bride who was about to be married and her mother gave her R2000. With

surprise she asked the mother why she had given her so much money. The mother said, find a piggy bank and put this money in. Whenever you are happy in your married life deposit more money in the piggy bank, and when you are unhappy use it. She took the money and kept it according to her mum's instructions. She also deposited more money each time when she was happy. After four years of marriage life and blessed with a baby girl, she started having difficulties in her married life and went to get her mum's advice. The mother said to her that if she wanted to get divorced, first she should use all the money she had in her piggy bank. When she went home she opened the piggy bank and found a lot of money, all she had saved for four years. Then, she decided to use it, but before she took some, the thought came to her mind, 'I kept this money when I was happy, how can I use it when I am unhappy?' As a result, she decided to keep the money and she kept the marriage intact, so that her and her husband lived happily thereafter. This story reminds us that we have so much happiness in life but, we tend to forget about it when difficulties set in.

After this inspiring story the students thanked the temple for the opportunity given to them, acknowledging the cost incurred to run the course, especially in these days of the global recession. They thanked the temple for its sensible actions in fighting poverty, ignorance, crime and hunger. With the computer knowledge they have acquired, they will be able to look for jobs, share with others their computer skills and hopefully make the community skilled and rich.

## New Computer Lab Opening Ceremony 6<sup>th</sup> Aug 2009



The opening ceremony for the new computer laboratory was attended by the community of Kwa-Mhlanga

mountain view, Kgantsho Primary School staff and learners, Nan Hua Temple's director Ven. Hui Fang and Mr. Phillip Chen on the 06th August 2009. Festivities were held at the school, where the lab is situated.

The lab was jointly established by Kgantsho Primary School and Buddha's Light International Association in order to serve as a skills development center for both the community and the learners, enabling the surrounding communities to have access to computer training. This is the only kind of a training facility around Kwa-Mhlanga which offers free computer training.

The training is offered to the community Monday to Friday, from 08h00 to 10h00am, while the learners occupy the lab from 11h00 till 14h00. We currently have a total of 18 computers, but plans for expansion are not too far away, as we hope various donors will come forward with additional computers and we will then be able to include more learners. We have two learners per computer at the moment, while we only recruited 18 community members – 1 per computer. We intend to have at least 40 computers in the near future, so that learners and community members will learn comfortably in our lab.

In Ven. Hui Fang's address, he thanked the school for accepting the invitation to establish the center. He also emphasized that it is for the community and accordingly it is their responsibility to ensure the safety of the computers and to work hard to effectively utilize the resources given to them. He also recognized the effort spearheaded by Nan Hua Temple's Outreach Dept. making the computer training possible.

On behalf of the school, the principal, Mrs. Kekane thanked the temple for their initiative and promised to continuously work closely with the temple on other ventures, that would also be aimed at uplifting the lives of the people of Kwa-Mhlanga in Mpumalanga.

## Temple visit by Tibetan Monastic with Relics 11<sup>st</sup> Aug 2009



On 11 August 2009 two Tibetan Lamas, Venerable Samdun and Venerable Nyingje who are British and American nationals respectively, visited the temple. BLIA Senior Supervisor Mr.

Huang and Chapter President Ms. De Man accompanied them. On their arrival at the temple, they received a warm welcome from the Abbot and temple people.

These two Lamas brought precious Relics. They used this

opportunity to share the relics with the temple people so that they can have opportunity of seeing them and pay homage. Among these relics there were those of the Buddha, Maha Sariputra, Maha Maudgalyayana, Maha Ananda and those of Nagarjuna Bodhisatva. The Abbot led everybody at the main temple to chant and pray to show respect to the relics, which followed by the Tibetan chanting by the Lamas. The aim of the chanting was to wish the Temple and the world peace and prosperous.

After the explanation by the guests, everybody went back to the Guest house to enjoy vegetarian feast. The Abbot exchanged gifts with them. He gave them a book by Grand Master called Water and Clouds. Before the guest left they indicated that Nan Hua Temple is a temple that really practice Humanistic Buddhistava hood, it is a temple that make sentient beings to attain Dharma joy, ease and happiness.

## CULTURA PARK Soccer Tournament 9<sup>th</sup> Aug 2009



On 09 August, for the first time ever, the community of Cultura Park had an opportunity to engage in a sporting event jointly organized by the parents of Cultura Park and Nan Hua temple. It was very exciting to see a lot of families in and around Cultura Park gathered at Cultura High School sports ground to witness this occasion.

The teams were instructed to bring only under 17 players for the competition. Teams from Delmas, Zithobeni, Rethabiseng (Sunday School) and Cultura Park areas brought in one team each.

A trophy was presented to the winning team, which was from Zithobeni, while second place was taken by Rethabiseng Buddhist Sunday school (or Nan Hua FC) after losing to the Zithobeni team by 1-0.

Though the competition was fierce, the families coming together to see their children's talents was the real aim of the event.

I hope next year the temple will to continue to support this event, as well as the families around Cultura Park.

# Learning Experiences of ABS Students

## African Buddhist Seminary

### Student Reflections on the Subject



**Ben Chan**  
DIAMOND SUTRA  
VEN. HUIXING

If one clings to any notion when giving, the merit gained will not be great. If we have the notion of a self when delivering others from suffering, we will not be able to develop our compassion. Only when we develop selfless compassion can we deliver all living beings. The diamond sutra says

“I should master the mind in such a way that I will lead all types of living beings, whether born of egg, womb, moisture, or transformation with or without form, with or without consciousness.” So to deliver sentient beings means that one should develop a mind large enough to deliver all beings without exception.



**Ben Dun**  
CHANGING DESTINY  
VEN. YUNGXUN

It is said that everyone's life is predestined and thus we just follow our fate until our demise. But actually, destiny does not bind those who accomplish numerous and exemplary deeds. Because our mind is created by our thoughts, speech and actions it creates our destiny. Therefore, we can

change this destiny by changing ourselves from within, by developing positive qualities such as virtue, integrity and kindness. By learning to give, we will also nourish our virtue and merits and then be able to uproot the poisons of selfishness and stinginess, in turn enabling us to pave the way to change our destiny and fate.



**Ben Dong**  
PERFECTION WISDOM  
VEN. HUISANG

Everything is a result of causes and conditions. Those who remain cheerful during difficult times are admirable and a source of inspiration to others. In life, each person is responsible for making a better world by planting the seeds of patience, love and honesty deep in our hearts. One fights oneself when angry and at that time you are

your own worst enemy.

The sutras explain that bodhisattvas accept that dharma is like space, a magic show, the moon reflected in water, a dream shadow etc. Thus even the dharma itself is empty. It is there because of causes and conditions, therefore it is impermanent and one should not be attached to it.



**Ben You**  
HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM  
VEN. YI CHUN

By practicing Humanistic Buddhism, we can change our lives and the world. It emphasizes how we can interact with each other harmoniously in society. It encourages one to think good thoughts, speak kindly and do good actions for the benefit of self and others. From this course I learnt how I can develop love, care and compassion so

that I can benefit others and be able to get along with different kinds of people. I have learnt that in our lives we need to create more friendships than enemies and whatever we do should be beneficial to all.



**Ben Ao**  
THE WAY TO BUDDHA HOOD  
VEN. HUI FANG

The function of precepts is to stop evil and encourage good acts, which leads to a pure mind, then a tranquil state of mind. If one has a restless, annoyed mind and is fond of doing evil, the end result is torment and regret. A tranquil mind allows one to have a correct understanding of life. A correct

outlook is based on correct investigating into the meaning of life and the path to follow. Originally our mind was capable of realizing the truth, but it is obstructed by ever present ignorance, so by getting rid of this ignorance, one will see light.



**Ben Ke**  
LOTUS SUTRA  
PROF. KRUGER

I joined ABS in 2007 and now am a third year student. One of our subjects is Buddhist Philosophy and History and is taught by Prof. Kruger from the Religious department of UNISA, where he has been a lecturer for more than 30 years. I really enjoy his class and learn a lot of things

in addition to Buddhism. For example his experiences, use of language, etc. In the history of Buddhism we started with India and analyzed different religions that co-existed with Buddhism in those early days. Then we studied the spread of Buddhism through Asia and later the West. From there we started to study Dharma and the philosophy within it. The basic principle in Buddhism is Truth and Wisdom or insight (to see into things). Truth about who am I, what I am, truth about things as they are (Nature), truth about Buddha nature, all of which is enjoyable and very interesting.



**Ben Su**  
MEDITATION  
VEN. HUISANG

At ABS, I have learned that Meditation plays an important role, helping practitioners calm themselves and bring together the scattered mind. Another thing I have learnt which has impressed me is how to deal with our anger. Once we are angry, all things in our mind change and we become slaves of our own actions and in the end suffering arises.

These sufferings are a result of the three poisons which are greed, anger and hatred. The only way to eradicate these was taught by Sakyamuni Buddha. He explained that we have to stop our attachment. He explained that we create our own world using the mind, so we should think properly before we do anything in order to avoid problems. I have also learnt about emptiness. The concept of emptiness explains clearly that everything is impermanent and it only depends on causes and conditions to arise and then exist.

# A Buddhist Perspective on a Troubled Economy



By Charles Day



The Fourth Summit of Religious Leaders on the occasion of the G8

(Charlie Day is a retired psychologist who teaches meditation and Buddhism in Des Moines, IA.)

**B**uddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths can help us understand and possibly relieve the suffering associated with our troubling economy. Buddha's first noble truth is that life is inherently problematic, filled with various degrees of suffering and discontent. Not only is there the obvious suffering associated with birth, sickness, aging, and dying, but we suffer when we are separated from what we like or want and when we are associated with what we dislike or can't avoid.

In these troubling economic times, there is much suffering related to the loss of jobs, homes, and retirement and investment savings. Even if we are fortunate in not yet being affected, perhaps family members or friends have lost their jobs or taken paycuts in pay, perks, or hours so that everyone can keep their job. Or we are expected to work even more hours without additional pay to do the work that laid-off employees were doing. And we all live under the economic threat that continues into an unpredictable future.

## **Suffering is caused by attachment to likes and dislikes**

Buddha's Second Noble Truth is about the causes of suffering. Suffering is caused by our attachments. We cling to wants and desires and try to push away and resist aversions and what we don't want. And we have difficulty letting go of these attachments when it's appropriate and beneficial to do so.

In these troubling economic times, it might be helpful to ask ourselves, how attached are we to our possessions, to our money, our home, our job, our style of living. And to our social and economic status and reputation as these are viewed by ourselves and our family, friends, colleagues, and community. Can we let go of our attachments to material possessions and the psychological images we have of ourselves? Ask yourself, "How much does my self respect, my self esteem, my self worth depend upon my net worth?"

Our difficulty in letting go of attachments prevents us from acknowledging without judgment and simply accepting the way things are. Instead we deny what Buddha called the three primary characteristics of reality: suffering, impermanence, and the interdependent unity of everybody and everything. We've already talked about suffering.

## **Everything is impermanent and interdependent**

Denial of impermanence was evident in our expectation that the value of our homes and our investments could only grow, and in the failure of the so-called experts to predict what was coming. And in our longing to maintain the illusion of what seemed to be a permanently rising market, most of us probably continue to ride the market up and down, despite its continuing to be part of a dramatically unpredictable and impermanent environment.

Buddha's third characteristic of reality that we tend to deny is our interdependency. This refers to the fact that everybody and everything in existence is interconnected and interdependent, and that nothing, no thing, no person, no self exists as a completely separate, independent, or autonomous entity.

In these troubling economic times, it might be helpful to remember that no one individual or group of individuals, no one industry, no one political party, and no one nation, is responsible for the problems we now face. Nor can we solve them as individuals or as one nation alone. We are all parts of an connected web of reality that functions as a unified interdependent whole. There is no better demonstration of this than the wide-ranging impact of the economy on housing, banking, investments, and employment, and on local, national, and global levels. We are all in this together. We always were, and we will always be.

## **Let's cooperate, not compete, as a unified whole**

Acknowledging the reality of our interdependence can aid us in understanding and compassionately cooperating with each other, rather than selfishly competing for what we fear are limited resources. We are not and never have been separate, and we need not feel isolated, alone, and afraid.

It should be emphasized that accepting that what is does not mean approving of the way things are. Nor does it mean being passive, indifferent, or insensitive to any suffering experienced by ourselves or others, or to the reality of the need for action or change. It simply means accepting the way it is and letting go of negative reactions so that one's energy is not wasted in emotional reactivity to what can't be changed, since it's already happened, or worrying about a future that has not yet arrived.

Let us realistically acknowledge and accept the problems associated with these troubling economic times and devote our energy to optimistically cooperating with others to find mutually acceptable solutions to our economic problems. And let us accept the real possibility that such solutions may not be forthcoming anytime soon, that what we and our leaders try may fail and ever backfire, and that we may have to continue to come with new cooperative strategies.

Accepting the way it is in order to deal more effectively and compassionately with problems is exquisitely reflected in the Serenity Prayer of Alcoholics Anonymous: "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

## **Suffering is overcome by accepting the way it is**

Buddha's Third Noble Truth tells us that suffering can be overcome, even when troubling circumstances remain the same.

Calm and equanimity can be attained by letting go of our attachments to selfish desires and to our negative judgments and reactions to what we don't like. We need to accept the reality of the ever-changing impermanent nature of all physical and mental phenomena, in this case, of the economy and the way of life we've grown accustomed to. We need to experience our inter-connectedness and trust in the unpredictable flow of a continuously changing and interdependent universe. In short, suffering is overcome when we experientially and intuitively realize and accept that life is inherently problematic, impermanent, and interdependent, when we simply say "yes" to life, to whatever it confronts us with, and accept that what is is. Doing this, counter intuitive as may seem, prepares us to more effectively and compassionately deal with problems that arise.

The Buddha's Fourth Noble Truth explains how to do this. Suffering, he said, can be overcome by practicing eight simple but profound steps on what is called the Eightfold Path. They are called Right Steps, not in the sense of being righteous, but because they are wise, skillful, and beneficial. The steps are Right Wisdom, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. I want to briefly elaborate on one of these Steps, Right Mindfulness, because it bears directly on what an individual can do to alleviate stress related to these troubling economic times.

### **Mindfulness and meditation can help us let go of stress**

Right Mindfulness means giving full, undivided attention to present moment sensations, feelings, perceptions, and our endless stream of thoughts, without habitually, unconsciously, and immediately reacting to them with judgments, comparisons, commentary, and unnecessary concerns about the past and future. We need to train our minds to recognize and let go of unproductive feelings and thoughts related to greed, anger, and separateness in order to be more mindful and proactive, rather than so scattered and reactive.

Sitting meditation is perhaps the single, most powerful method of training the mind to be mindful and to let go of negativity. It instructs one to attend to the changing physical sensations of the breath, to notice when the attention has strayed to thoughts, feelings, sounds, or other body sensations, and to let go of these distractions and return the attention to the breath. In short it trains the mind to focus and to let go of distractions.

This practice of focusing and refocusing on the breath can be done anytime, for one or several minutes while sitting in formal meditation, while waiting for an appointment, standing in line, or when walking from place to place. And it can be specifically practiced whenever negative thoughts and feelings agitate the mind in order to let go of them. Over 50 years of scientific research has consistently shown that the practice of meditation – and it does need to be systematically practiced - helps us become more relaxed, think more clearly, and experience more compassion and loving kindness in our life, in spite of its ups and downs.

Buddhist Master Sogyal Rinpoche, author of "The Tibetan Book of the Living and Dying," says this about dealing with thoughts and feeling:

"Whatever thoughts and emotions arise in meditation (and, I would add, at any other time when you want to rid yourself of them) allow them to rise and settle, like the waves in the ocean. Whatever you find yourself thinking, let that thought rise and settle, without any constraint. Don't grasp at it, feed it, or indulge it; don't cling to it, and don't try to solidify it. Neither follow thoughts nor invite them in. Be like the ocean looking at its own waves, or the sky gazing down on the clouds that pass across it. You will soon find that thoughts are like the wind; they come and go. The secret is not to 'think' about the thoughts but to allow them to flow through your mind, while keeping your mind free of afterthoughts."

I'd like now to share a couple of my favorite Buddhist stories, one reflecting the suffering created by negative thoughts and feelings and the other highlighting the value of generosity and letting go.

### **Heaven or Hell: It's Your Choice**

A big, burly Japanese samurai comes to a Zen master and says, "Tell me the nature of heaven and hell."

The Zen master looks him in the face and says, "Why should I talk to a scruffy, disgusting, miserable slob like you? A worm like you, do you think you can understand anything?"

Consumed by rage, the samurai draws his sword and raises it to cut off the master's head. The Zen master says, "That's hell."

Instantly, the samurai understands that he has created his own hell - black and hot, filled with hatred, self-protection, anger, and resentment. He sees that he was so deep in hell that he was ready to kill someone. Tears fill his eyes as he puts his palms together to bow in gratitude for this insight.

The Zen master says, "That's heaven." (From Pema Chodron's "Comfortable with Uncertainty: 108 Teachings," Shambhala Publications, 2002.)

This story reminds us that hell can consist of experiencing negative emotions and thoughts. And Heaven is the equanimity that results when one gains insight into their ego-driven, selfless, and impermanent nature, and is able to accept and let go of them, without judging, indulging, resisting, or otherwise reacting to them, to just let them rise and pass away. And remember the kind of acceptance I'm talking about actually inspires appropriate and compassionate action when circumstances call for it.

### **A Buddhist Fable On Generosity**

A Buddhist monk was walking barefoot on a dusty road when he stepped on something sharp. It stuck in his heel, so after a few steps he stopped to pull it out. Low and behold, it was a very beautifully carved and very valuable gemstone. The monk rinsed it off at a well he was passing and tossed it in his satchel, along with the partial loaf of bread that was to be his one meal of the day.

A little further down the road, the monk happened upon a beggar. The beggar spied the partial loaf, leapt in front of the monk, bowed three times and said, "O Venerable Sir! I am but a poor starving beggar. Might I have a taste of your bread?" Whereupon the monk pulled the loaf from his satchel, and before handing it to the beggar, pulled the gem from the crust where it had become imbedded. He then handed the entire loaf to the beggar.

The beggar saw the gemstone and pleaded, "O, Most Worthy One! I have taken your only meal of the day, and this is not right. I see you have a gemstone, which would relieve me greatly of my situation. May I give you back your bread in exchange for the gem?" At this, the monk promptly gave the gemstone to the beggar, telling him also to keep the bread. The beggar was ecstatic and galloped off down the road.

The monk, noticing it was time for meditation, sat down under a nearby tree. A few minutes later he became aware of the presence of someone and opening his eyes, he saw the beggar, who thrust out his hand with the gem, saying, "O Venerable One, may I please return the gem to you? I don't want it!"

The monk asked, "What sir, do you want?" And the beggar replied, "I want what you have that allowed you to give away everything."



## Logical Buddhism

by Steven Sher

When I first became curious about Buddhism, I read an introductory book which gave a very basic review of the core beliefs of Buddhism. One of the first things I read was the following statement by the Buddha:

“Do not accept anything just because it accords with scriptures. Do not accept anything because it agrees with your

opinions or because it is socially acceptable. Do not accept anything because it comes from the mouth of a respected person. Rather, observe closely and if it is to the benefit of all, accept and abide by it.”

This, the Buddha commented, applied equally to his teachings.

This had a certain appeal to me. How often in religious practice do we hear that one should abandon logic and just have faith? The Buddha’s statement said something different. It said, look at and analyse what I say, then see if it is logical. Only if it makes sense to you should you take it on. With that in mind I read further.

The statement of the Buddha set a good foundation for what was to follow. As I read further into the principles of Buddhism I applied the Buddha’s statement. What I found was a system based entirely on logic - a system which explained the “human condition” in simple and understandable terms.

The manner in which the Buddha spread the dharma was also entirely logical. It’s most basic teaching (the Four Noble Truths) lies at its foundation, and upon this the remaining principles are added. Yet there is, really, no need to look any further than the Four Noble Truths to find the answer to what this life means, why it means what it means and how to move forward with it.

The Four Noble Truths are:

1. All things and experiences in this life are marked by suffering or frustration. (It is hardly, if ever, that we are at peace with ourselves and the world. We seem to always want for better or more. Moreover, life is marked by pain, illness and the certainty of eventual death).
2. The arising of suffering or frustration comes from desire, craving or clinging. (The reason why we suffer and are not at peace is caused by this constant want for better or more. We seem unable to be content with what we have or what we are experiencing here and now).
3. To achieve the cessation or end of suffering, one must abandon desire, craving or clinging.
4. The way to do this is by following the Buddha’s teaching on how to live life (the Eightfold Path).

Buddhism speaks of looking inside and fixing the problems within instead of looking to the rest of the world to try and fix them. Moreover, Buddhism offers a way of accessing this inner world in a simple yet profound way. The manner in which Buddhism suggests we can come to peace with ourselves is perhaps best illustrated by the following story.

In a time before men wore shoes, a man was walking along a road when he came across a Zen Master. The Zen Master stopped and said “Good morning”. “Good morning?” the man replied. “There is nothing good about it”. “What troubles you?” asked the Zen Master. “I have been walking for days and my feet are in great pain” the

man said.

“I have an idea for you” said the Zen Master. “Why don’t you buy some soft padded material and as you walk place it along the road in front of you all the way till you get to your destination.”

“You old fool,” the man replied, “I have a further two day journey ahead of me. There isn’t enough of such material in the whole world to do as you suggest.” “Oh I see” said the Zen Master. “You make a good point. How right you are. Why not then just get enough material to make a padding to bind onto your feet.”

Too often people will try and gain happiness or contentment in life by changing things external to themselves – they will acquire more or better material possessions or try and change the viewpoints and ideas of those around them so that they are more like their own. Buddhism’s response is the opposite. It tell us that to gain happiness, one must look to themselves and change their attitudes and reactions to the world around them. This again is entirely logical as a person is quite able, with time and effort, to change themselves, but no matter how hard one tries one will never get the world at large to do as he or she pleases.

The practice of Buddhism is by no means easy and it is not necessarily a practice for all people. Yet for those who are interested and willing, they will find a logical and simple way of accessing inner spirituality.



by Gerrit Nel

For many years it has been my wish to express the great gratitude and appreciation for all the people that I have seen benefit from the wheelchair donations by Nan Hua Temple and the Buddha’s Light International Association (BLIA).

I myself have been confined to a wheel chair since the age of four and have been very fortunate to have been able to have had a wheelchair for my life. The availability and use of my wheelchair has opened so many doors which have made it possible for me to study at a higher education institution and to perform my work in the public sector.

I have travelled extensively in Africa and have seen many poor and underprivileged people that are in desperate need of wheelchairs. I can just imagine how much they might benefit from a donation of wheelchairs. Such a donation will ultimately improve their quality of life tremendously and empower them to grasp the opportunities that exist everyday. They will then be able to function independently, freed from needing the assistance of other people and be able to move about at will.

I have pleasure in donating regularly to the wheelchair project and would urge people to donate more, in order to empower disabled and elderly people in the poor and under- privileged communities that exist everywhere in Africa.

Remember! Wheelchairs are our feet.