

NanHua

Monthly NEWSLETTER

Photo : Ven. Hui Rong

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Wonderful Deeds and Touching Stories

To overlook another's good deeds and publicize his wrongdoings is a common practice in today's society. It is a social disease that needs to be cured by praising the virtues of others instead. Many wonderful things occur in society every day, events that are worthy of our attention. What we really need to do is to promote the good and to instill a sense of morality in a rapidly degrading world.

For example, recently Mr. Yang Fuyi miraculously wakened from a six-month coma caused by a massive brain hemorrhage. Although he has yet to recover his ability to communicate verbally, and could initially only manage a smile or shake hands as a gesture of affection, speech therapy and other relevant care have been provided to him by the nonprofit Creation of Life Foundation in the hope that he may one day regain the full use of all his faculties.

In another example, Mrs. Bauer of New Mexico awoke from a long coma on Christmas eve in 1999. She was comatose for sixteen years after giving birth to her fourth child. Her recovery has not only brought enormous joy to her children, but has also given much needed hope to families in similar situations.

During the 1999 earthquake in Taiwan, the Baihao Temple was completely destroyed. In addition to being a place of worship for many Buddhists, it was a sanctuary for troubled youth. Recently, followers have organized a series of fundraising events for the purpose of collecting money to rebuild the temple. People from all walks of life have contributed to the cause.

Earlier this year, at the largest garden in suburban Taipei,

Dharma Talks

By Grand Master Hsing Yun



sixty-four couples took their wedding vows in front of the Buddha. Venerable Sheng-yen of Dharma Drum Buddhist Order presided over the unique ceremony, which brought a new aspect of Buddhism to the general public. In Taichung, more than 10,000 people joined Venerable Wei Chueh of Chung Tai Temple and Minister Wang Ching-ping of the Legislative Ministry of Taiwan in offering a candle of blessing to all living beings. The event was widely covered by the media and well received by the audience. When Tibetan monks were forced into exile in India by their own government, Indian authorities took extra measures to provide them with special care.

When Hu Yufan developed three of the world's smallest artificial satellites in the United States, he led humankind into a new frontier and brought unlimited benefits to the present and the future. When two whales were beached off the American coast last June, a group of caring scientists carefully nursed them back to health for their safe return to the Atlantic Ocean. The American people's general respect for animal rights and life is praiseworthy.

Around the globe there are many touching stories and wonderful deeds that prove that the world is not as bad as it seems. What we need from the media is positive reporting and uplifting news, the reporting of events that will change our lives for the better and encourage good social behavior. Let our society be touched with stories of loving kindness and compassion; let our lives be enriched by each other's courage and charity.

Durban BLIA came out in Full Support



The Durban Chapter of the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) has organized its first winter charity relief drive in June. Even in these trying economic times, BLIA members and volunteers from the local Chinese

community in Durban came out in full force to make a difference the needy community.

Mr. Wang, vice president of Durban BLIA, led the project worked tirelessly with fellow committee members raised enough money for 600 wool blankets and 250 of food parcels. "We have acted according to the Buddha's benevolent instruction to 'broadly form good affinities' with our community", says Mr. Wang.

Ven. Hui Fang, Abbot of Nan Hua Temple, joined the group from Gauteng to show his full support and encouraged BLIA members, "A single good word is like a warm fire in the cold and a single spark of light is like the sun at high noon. Just one meal may allow a hungry person to survive and just one blanket may offer someone warmth in the dead of winter."

The Abbot was invited to present two Dharma Talks by the local BLIA members and Buddhist devotee. The first Dharma Talk conducted in Chinese titled "Daily Practice by reflecting your mind with the Buddha" at the Durban Meditation Centre. In his talk, the Abbot says, "Allow our vision to correspond with the Buddha and clearly see and understand the suffering of all beings. Allow our speech to correspond to the Buddha in saying wonderful and kind words. Allow our actions to correspond



to the Buddha by being willing to help our friends. Allow our thoughts to correspond to the Buddha and concentrate on benefiting mankind."

The second Dharma Talk entitled "The Power of Learning" took place the following day at a local primary school attended by both Chinese and members from the local community. The event was started by showing a short film on the various charity programs facilitated by Nan Hua Temple and BLIA members from the Johannesburg and Pretoria chapters. With the help of simultaneous interpretation from Siphon, an graduate from the African Buddhist Seminary, into Zulu, the Abbot shared with all participants, "Today, in spite of advancements in science, technology and an abundance of materials and resources – materialism still abounds. Morality has been tainted, vexations flourish and crimes have increased daily. We have not been at ease and we have not been at peace."

"We need to learn from the Buddha's Teaching to learn his spirit of exercising both compassion and wisdom. To learn his skillful means of adapting teaching according to capabilities and to learn from his fearless courage to liberate all beings from the sea of suffering."

Everyone shared the joyous atmosphere and the Durban BLIA would like to express its thankfulness to Ven. Hui Fang and all members involved to make its first charity drive a great success.

Bringing Love and Warmth to the Mother City

20th June 2009

by the Cape Town BLIA



The annual Winter Charity Relief organised by the Cape Town Chapter of the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) took place on 20th June where 600 food hampers and blankets were distributed to

two old-age homes, two orphanages and a shelter for abused women.

Led by its Chairman, Mr. Su, over 30 members from the Cape Town BLIA took part in this charity event. Ven. Hui Xing, general manager of Nan Hua Temple, attended the event from Johannesburg and expressed his appreciation to the local BLIA for making a difference to the deprived community.

"Poor people do not necessarily crave relief, what they need most is the dignity of life. They do not necessarily hope for care and concern, what they need most is independence in life. Supposing they have good cause and conditions, they will also be able to become great people," says Ven. Hui Xing.

When the BLIA members arrived at the various institutions, the children, in particular, were ecstatic and welcomed us with songs, laughter and even martial arts. According to their foster



mothers the economic downturn has a serious implication to the future of these children as they struggled to collect enough donation to run the orphanage.

Mr. Su also encouraged fellow BLIA members, "As long as we have some strength to spare, we will continue to relieve and help the poor and distressed to help them from occasionally losing of their strength. We need to show our support to the old-age, orphans and fellow men and women to realize that there are still caring people in their lives".

Ven. Hui Xing concluded the event with a prayer:
*May we be able to bring peace and comfort to the world,
And awaken everyone's innate conscience and ability;
May we be able to inspire kind, self-nature,
And spread everyone's auspicious and harmonious seeds;
May the future not have deficiencies in materials,
And may everyone become spiritually wealthy
Oh great compassionate Buddha,
Please accept our sincerest prayers*

My Wheelchair brings me my Freedom Back

by the Johannesburg BLIA

23rd June 2009

Since 1992 Nan Hua Temple and BLIA (Buddha's Light International Association) have donated over 15 000 wheelchairs across the continent to people in need. When Ms. Li, a shop owner, and Captain Enoch Masehla of the Johannesburg Police Station both of whom are volunteers to the Salvation Army's Ethembeni Home for the Aged approached Mrs. Daman Ying, Chairwoman of the Johannesburg chapter of the BLIA, for assistance with wheelchairs, Ying did not hesitate to contact Nan Hua Temple to facilitate the donation.

The Wheelchair Handover Ceremony took place on 23rd June at the China City Mall in Johannesburg. Venerable Hui Fang, Abbot of Nan Hua Temple, Captain Nomsa Mokoena, representative from the Salvation Army, Chairwoman Ying and members from the Johannesburg BLIA attended the function. Ten wheelchairs were handed over to residents from the Ethembeni Home for the Aged.

"There are many people living in misery suffering from the ordeals of old age, illness and death enduring the consequences of their karma. Some are blind and cannot see this wonderful world. Some are physically handicapped and lost their accessibility to freedom," says Ven. Hui Fang. "The dignity of life is not about being young or old but about the sweet memory it leaves behind. The meaning of life is not about how long or short it is but about the example it sets".



18th Computer Graduation Ceremony

9th June 2009

by Abby



We are very proud to report that the Temple held its 18th computer graduation ceremony, this also being the 4th graduation for the students from Dark City, Ekangala

area. This course was successfully completed for basic computer skills and was held over a 2 month period, for a total of 25 students. All students completed the course successfully and now have basic computer skills, covering an introduction to the computer, typing, Word, Excel and Powerpoint. The students all received certificates confirming their successful completion of the course, which was sponsored in full by the Temple.

The Graduation Ceremony was led by Venerable Hui Xing, who expressed the hope that their new knowledge would help them find employment, as all the participants are currently unemployed. We appeal to everyone, including NGO'S, NPO's and government to assist by providing working opportunities for these students.

Gratitude was also expressed to the Mandromsobo Combined School, for their continual support for this course, which is held at their premises.

The students expressed their heart felt appreciation to the temple for its commitment in supporting the community to fight poverty, crime and unemployment.

The 5th intake is already in training and we hope by the end of this August they will have completed their course.

Winter Relief for Nan Hua Temple Staff

5th June 2009



After the series of winter relief events to needy communities, Nan Hua Buddhist Temple did not forget about its staff who work diligently in the temple. On the 5th of June, the

Temple held a blessing function for all the staff members and distributed consumer goods such as cooking oil, salt, sugar, rice, wool blankets and paraffin stoves, so

that they would pass this winter warmly.

The blessing function was led by the abbot Ven. Master Hui Fang and the staff followed the master in chanting the Buddha's name devoutly. These staff members have been working for the temple for a long time.

At the close of the ceremony, Ven. Master Hui Fang blessed the staff by sharing with them Grand Master Hsing Yun's prayer. He thanked the staff for their hard work in maintaining the beautiful temple and its environment. He also blessed their families, wishing them health and harmony.

Prison Refuge and Precepts Ceremony 2009

by Peter G Just

On 9 June 2009 we finally managed to do a refuge and precepts ceremony at Zonderwater Prison. The ceremony was officiated by Venerable Hui-xiang, and assisted by Venerables Hui-liao and Hui-bo, with Zando translating.

The usual problems of gaining access, being escorted to the venue, and so forth were encountered, in spite of trying to make prior arrangements. This was one of the biggest groups of offenders participating, with 26 taking refuge, and nine taking the five basic precepts. Since the prior arrangement did not really happen properly we were also only given permission to bring in vegetarian meals the evening before, and accordingly the temple kitchen was only able to provide sandwiches.

I usually visit Zonderwater Medium A Prison once a month, and Ven. Hui-xiang also goes once a month due to there being a couple of offenders who mainly speak Chinese. There is a growing interest in Buddhism among offenders, as they view it as a non-prescriptive way of life which mainly gives guidance and advice, contrary to most of the other religions.



Accordingly they are also more receptive than to being told what they may or may not do with their lives. Invariably they have by now accepted the fact that they have messed-up, and what they are seeking is a way to make sense of their state of affairs, and a means of charting the future. With Buddhism they find a means of learning to develop a tranquil mind, and also realise that they cause their own experience of contentment and/or suffering.

Almost Five Years Behind Bars with Buddhism

After having served one and a half years at Pretoria Local Prison, I met Peter Just from Nan Hua Temple, Bronkhorstspuit. This was to be a turning point in my life. (Karma) Tsegal, Ven. Hui-fang and other Bhikkhus guided me to salvation. Knowing and understanding that we all strive only to be happy, to be free of suffering. Also realising that everything is in a state of change, that nothing stays the same as we are all living in Samsara. However knowing and understanding what life is all about, one thing is certain, nobody, but nobody, shall escape death. Understanding Karma helps you to realise that whatever we do, wholesome or unwholesome, does matter. Karmic retribution is all that we will take with us to the afterlife. So while we strive to be in a moment of purity, with meditation, we attempt to take this moment of purity into our daily life and to be kind, honest, and develop a sincere compassion towards other sentient beings.

Why do people, human beings, not see the truth? Life as it is? They are simply too consumed with others. All of creation and you are one. They are your fathers, mothers, brothers sisters, uncle and aunts, so treat them kindly.

After being relocated to the Pretoria Central Prison, from Pretoria Local Prison. At Pretoria, Department of Correctional Services, a system is in place to help offenders. But few use the tools to "fish" and do not learn how to catch a fish! (Karma) Tsegal was again there to guide me and others. Four and a half years later, Peter also introduced me to other Dharma friends. A special thank you to Wendy Toner! Amitofo.

"I" have come to the realisation of many things. I have contemplated many things to discover the truth for myself. I was custodian of the Buddhist Library and having had approximately 150 books at my disposal brought to us by Peter Just and Wendy Toner. I have read briefly most of them and in time have

discovered a new way of thinking. Do what you do for the benefit of others, and in time even you will benefit. To make someone else happy, even just a smile, is well worth the wholesome effort.

Wendy taught me how to deal with "death". Having lost a dear friend to the World Trade Centre tragedy, I fell into depression and together with the Correctional Services psychologist, I understood that karma indeed does exist. Prison has given me the time to think! To make something out of this chaos that I found myself in! Buddhism was my guide, the Dharma is clearly a pearl to be understood, contemplated and realised. Prison does indeed only exist in your mind, your mind, being one of our six senses, can and will deceive you. So do take care of being in the moment. Before your mind will go into thinking action of labelling what you perceive, your true nature is to be your guide. Through mindfulness you will start to see the beauty of life as it sparks up your life as to those around you. Humble yourself, understanding that you cannot harm others without also harming yourself. So understand others and their actions too. Do not open yourself to abuse however. Compassion is not all about being nice.

When you have found the beginning of the way, the star of your soul will show its light. And by that light you will perceive how great is the darkness in which it burns.

I would like to thank Grand Master Hsing Yun for creating Nan Hua Temple, the Abbot Venerable Hui-fang at Nan Hua Temple, Bronkhorstspuit, RSA, for their support during my stay at Pretoria Correctional Centre. To Peter Just, "you humble me". Thank you for your continued support over the past four and a half years that I have known you. You are a true friend and example, "Thank You" my friend. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish you a wholesome retreat. "God" speed my friend and may Buddha's light shine upon you.

Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha.

zh "i"

By Grand Master Hsing Yun



N i g h t l y W a n d e r i n g s

At the monastery where Zen Master Sengai lived, there was a student monk who often took advantage of nighttime, stealthily climbing over the monastery wall to go out and have some fun. Zen Master Sengai was making his rounds one night when he discovered a tall stool in the corner of the wall. Only then did it dawn on him that someone had been sneaking out. Without disturbing others, he simply moved the stool aside and stood in its place to wait for the student monk to return.

In the deep of night, the student monk returned from his wanderings. Unaware that the stool had been moved, he climbed over, stepped squarely on the head of Zen Master Sengai, and hopped to the ground. Only then did

he clearly see that it was the Zen Master. He was so frightened he did not know what to do!

However, Zen Master Sengai, not minding in the least, comforted him, saying, "The night is deep and heavy with dew. Take care of your health: do not catch cold! Hurry back and put on some more clothes."

No one else in the entire monastery knew of this incident and Zen Master Sengai never mentioned it. However, from then on, not one of the monastery's more than one hundred student monks ever wandered out a night again.

The best education is and education of love. Using encouragement instead of reproach and consideration instead of punishment, it is even easier to receive the benefits of education.

Those like Zen Master Sengai take the unique characteristics of Chan education and develop them to the fullest. Chan education takes compassion and skillful means as its principles. Whether through blows and shouts, or strict discipline, we must first consider the student's capacity before we can implement great compassion and skillful means. Parents and teachers everywhere should first consider the capabilities of their children and students, and then apply the corresponding kind of education. Reform, loving-kindness, and personal example are the best Chan teachings.

D o n o t w i p e i t o f f

There was a young man who was very hot-tempered. Moreover, he liked to fight with others so a lot of people did not like him. One day, he unintentionally wandered into Daitoku Temple. By coincidence, he heard Zen Master Ikkyu giving a Dharma talk. After listening to it, he vowed to repent his past mistakes and said to Zen Master Ikkyu, "Master, I will never again fight or quarrel with other people so as to avoid being disliked by all. Even if someone spits in my face, I will tolerantly wipe it off and silently bear it!"

Zen Master Ikkyu said, "Oh! Why bother? Just let the spit dry by itself. Don't wipe it off!"

"How is that possible? Why do I have to endure it like that?"

"This isn't about being able to or not being able to endure. You just treat it as a mosquito or an insect resting on your face. It's not worth fighting with it or scolding it. Although you are spit upon, that is actually not an insult. Accept it with a smile!" Ikkyu said.

"If the other party doesn't spit, but uses his fists to strike you, then what do you do?"

"The same! Don't take it too much heart. It's only a punch after all."

Hearing this, the young man thought what Ikkyu had said was totally unreasonable. Finally, unable to control himself, he suddenly raised his fist, struck Zen Master Ikkyu on the head, and asked, "Monk, how about now?"

The Zen Master said in a very concerned manner, "My head is as hard as a rock. I didn't feel much.

On the contrary, your hand probably hurts from hitting me!"

The youth was dumbfounded and could not say anything.

In this world-no matter what it is-talking about it is easy; doing it is very difficult. We talk about not getting angry, but when circumstances arise, we cannot control ourselves. A Chan practitioner said, "When talking, it seems like we are enlightened; when facing conditions, delusions arise." This is such a description.



The Three Evil Roots

(DESIRE, ANGER, AND IGNORANCE.)

The afflictions; desire, anger, and ignorance.

Are the roots of all evils.

Ignorance is like being drunk and confused,

The fault of anger is serious and that of greed is deep.

Bad factors and evil portions of the mind – whether they are intellectual, emotional, or volitional – are all incorrect and inappropriate; they cause us to be agitated and annoyed. That which causes instability, disharmony, and uneasiness is called an affliction; afflictions create all kinds of karma leading to future suffering. Afflictions are very complex, but three of them – desire, anger, and ignorance – are the sources of all evil. They are called the three evil roots.

Calling them "roots" means that all afflictions can be divided into the three broad categories of desire, anger, and ignorance. All other afflictions are simply the branches and divisions of these three. For example, craving, defilement, covetousness, attachment, stinginess, fraudulence, arrogance, restlessness, etc., are form of desire. Fury, hatred, annoyance, jealousy, etc., are forms of anger. False views, doubt, unbelief, stupor, forgetfulness, non discernment, etc., are forms of ignorance. All sentient beings have afflictions, but each has different inclinations. People who have a certain category of afflictions will have a corresponding personality; for instance, there are people with desirous, angry, or ignorant personalities. People who do not have a particular inclination toward any one of the three categories have personalities that are equally made up of all three. As a more detailed classification there are also nineteen types of personalities.

Since the afflictions are too numerous to explain here in detail, the three evil roots will suffice as an illustration. Ignorance is stupidity; it is also a state of being unenlightened, of not knowing anything about the practical aspects of the principles of reality. This is not to say that one does not know anything. On the contrary, one has a certain kind of knowledge, but it is wrong, distorted – it seems to be correct but is really incorrect. It is like being drunk and confused. Thus one takes the affirmative as the negative and the negative as the affirmative, and the existent to be nonexistent and nonexistent to be existent. One says what one should not, laughs at what should not, cries when one should not, and does what one should not. Confusion, distortion, and suspicion – such are the forms of ignorance; these afflictions are the most difficult to treat completely. As for what is not known, this includes not knowing about good and evil, not

knowing about cause and effect, not knowing about karma and result, not knowing about ordinary people and sages, not knowing about practical aspects and principles. As for what is known, one knows the impermanent as the permanent, unhappiness as happiness, the impure as the pure, the nonexistence of the self as the self. One either has doubts about the practical aspects or the principles of reality or has erroneous views about them.

Anger is aversion that comes from being dissatisfied with conditions. If expressed, it is described as fury, disputation, harmfulness, and anger. If stored in the mind, it is described as resentment, hatred, and jealousy. These faults are very serious. Not only are bad things done because of them, but also good deeds may be destroyed because of one's lack of tolerance, perhaps by a single angry thought.

From the past to the present, each of us has been in a close relationship with all other sentient beings. One should therefore have compassion (without anger and harmfulness) in order to be of benefit to oneself and not harm others; being harmonious with others benefits both oneself and others. The afflictions of anger is just the opposite of this harmony. It is the source of all extremely violent and wicked crimes. As a sutra says, "The rise of an angry thought can open eighty thousand doors to obstacles." It also says that anger is like a fire that burns up all good roots.

Greed is the attachment to oneself and to all that is related to oneself. One broods over the past, is attached to the present, and is desirous of the future. Although greed is not as serious as the fire of anger, it penetrates thoroughly like water; this fault is very deep. Greedy desire is primarily self-love that is concerned with the present and the future. With regard to others, for example, this is love for one's parents, children, siblings, and friends. With regard to things, it is love for one's wealth, business, scholarships, and fame. Although one can do many good deeds through greed, they are only partially good because they are based on the defiling love of the self.

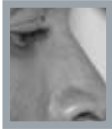
Sometimes, such love can turn into anger toward others, for anger is the other side of love. Loving to an extreme can become the utmost hatred sometimes. According to the Buddha Dharma, this is also the way people are, It is also characteristic of this selfish love, which is attached to everything, that it is affected by change and therefore causes suffering. So the Buddha says, "When love arise, suffering arises"

Excerpts from 'The Way to Buddhahood' by Venerable Yin Shun

Learning Experiences of ABS Students

African Buddhist Seminary

The Virtue of *Patience*



Ben Ke There are various methods of tolerating difficulties and for forgiving those who are hurting us. One of these methods is to develop a mind of accepting your past lives.

Firstly we have to understand that cause and effect is not just a theory, but also directly affects our reality. Whatever we do will not disappear into thin air. Why? Because it belongs to us and is our property, which follows us just like a shadow, which is always there, just waiting for light and then it appears.

Secondly we have to understand and accept that our past lives were not pure lives like the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas. When this concept is firm in our minds, then it is very easy to accept whatever difficulties occur. Moreover we can not only accept, but also deal with them according to the Dharma.

When we understand that our difficulties are because of our previous lives, we know that we created them and we own them. Let us persevere and experience the consequences.

Resisting difficulties will not have any benefit. It will only result in creating another shadow. With this in mind, it is easier to be patient and persevere with a lot of difficulties.



Ben Dun Amongst all sentient beings, it is said that to become annoyed with any sentient being is to become annoyed with the Buddha. Thus when it has been said that "this pigeon will later become a Buddha" it signifies that all beings have the capability of attaining Buddhahood which in turn shows equality among all beings.

By thinking thus, one should not look down or slight any sentient being. This practice will help to improve ones kindness and compassion by not giving rise to the poison of anger. Furthermore, by reflecting thus one will also overcome pride and arrogance because of the realization of the nature of equality among all beings.



Ben Chan Being patient is one way of teaching sentient beings how to be a bodhisattva, as one comes across different challenges like being scolded at or shouted at. It is through the understanding of impermanence that we realize being shouted at is something which

passes and won't stay forever. So by understanding this concept one can realize the importance of being patient towards everyone. In so doing we can avoid a lot of difficult situations and other people can learn from us as well.

We also have to remember that whatever we do in life comes to us because of causes, conditions and effects. So no matter how difficult the situation is, we must bear in mind that it will come to an end and until that happens, we need to be patient so that we can achieve something.



Ben You In the society we live, we experience unfavorable situations, some of which are unreasonable, prompted by jealousy, hatred and ignorance. So what should we do? Well, we should first understand that if we react in the same way, it will bring more conflict. If we become angry, then it will harm ourselves and others too, because anger cannot solve problems. So what we should try to do is to use that moment to practice patience. We should regard those people who torment us as our friends, our teachers and we should treat them with additional affection and respect. Why? Because if they did not inflict torment on us, we would not have the chance to be patient.

Therefore when someone humiliates us, we must learn how to face them, gently and good humouredly, because those who can remain cheerful during difficult times are admirable and a source of inspiration to others. Patience and tolerance avoid conflict and anger by seeing the right side of things. It is in this way that one can see the good side of why someone curses or beats us.



Ben Dong If a person curses or beats us, we have to think that it is in order to correct us. This means there is something wrong which we need to change.

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Ben Su Of all the afflictions, anger is the most serious with severe punishment. In one of his teachings, Sakyamuni Buddha wrote different stanzas explaining clearly about anger. He explained that it is only the one who is angry, who has the potential to do something in order to

kill his anger. Anger is the root of the poison that destroys goodness and the bonds with our friends. A lot of people who have been facing problems act badly, because of failing to defeat anger and then they find themselves with different problems. Others even develop diseases because of anger. If we kill anger then we are safe, we feel no sadness and we need not experience any repentance. By using a calm mind everything can be solved.

THE IMPACT OF BUDDHISM ON MY LIFE

BY ANDREAS LABUSCHAGNE



When I received the question of “how Buddhism has benefited and is benefiting my life?” I sat and looked around my room. I saw Buddhism everywhere. This does not entirely mean that when I say that I saw Buddhism everywhere that I solely mean to say that I see Buddhism in the simple yet profound things such as the trees outside my window, the cob-webs in a dusty corner, the paint chipping from the ceiling, the birds occupying the skies and making nests for an on-coming hatchling, or the sound of traffic in the distance – all really just states of mind anyway; but when I say that I saw Buddhism everywhere I talk about the gross cultural stuff that signify the tracks of Buddhism across different nations and periods in history.

What does this mean? I am saying that since Buddhism has had such a profound impact on my life I have unconsciously surrounded myself with a lot of “spiritual material” such as mala (prayer beads), a ton of Buddhist books, Tibetan singing bowl and Tingsha (Tibetan cymbals), vajra and ghanta (sacred instruments: wand and bell), Buddha statues, Buddha pictures, paintings of Buddhas, a tea ceremony set, Bonsai trees, Buddhist music, and the list continues.

As you can see above, it might seem that this stuff can become a source of baggage just the same as it may benefit me. At this moment I am reminded by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and Bodhidharma to cut the nonsense and return to the heart of Buddhist practice. PRACTICE!

In the end I do not need a whole lot of stuff to remind me that I am a practicing Buddhist, this stuff reminds me that Buddhism is more than a statue or sweet smelling incense, it is the state of my mind beyond all my attachments. All things around me become reminders that the Buddha Dharma is truly everywhere.

These artefacts and sense-impressions sit around waiting for me to realize their essential meaning within me, within the moment. Although I value the stuff and all the other Buddhist impressions that have had an impacted on me the underlying teaching reminds me that all these things come to pass, that “I” will come to pass. One may find an interesting collection of stuff in my room and when reflected on one may see how each individual history of everything present in our internal and external (gross, mental and so forth) environment has an interdependent and empty nature which dies in each passing moment and equally lives forever in a timeless moment.

What I deeply treasure about Buddhism is not the beautiful architecture and priceless artefacts but the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. In my heart and mind I feel the pristine awakened awareness (Buddha) connecting with everything and everyone, the Dharma shapes everything without personified prejudice,

and the Sangha, the beautiful Sangha! Are the gentle smiles we share with each other where no word need be spoken.

This is honouring the unique flavour of all things and processes not for their simple aesthetic value but rather for their impermanent and imperfect nature. The Japanese speak of wabi-sabi, which is, more or less, an aesthetic philosophical perspective that appreciates the harmony of nature’s natural imbalances; for example: the rust that accumulates on a metal rafter after years of misty weather, or the chipped tea-cup from the countless occasions of being placed against other objects. This is naturally the Dharma (the great law of the universe).

How does this apply to me and you? These understandings fundamentally affect the way we view reality. Our perception and world-understanding affects the way we engage the world and each other. I believe if we truly want to be happy (and that is what ‘this’ is all about anyway) we should serve this world, each other, every moment with a compassionate motivation and a heart of wisdom.

Buddhism to me is freedom from myself for the freedom of all sentient life. What better way for me to seal this notion with a “Namu Amida Bu!” (Japanese; Chinese: Namo Amitofo!). Amitabha Buddha is the warm presence in my heart, the compassionate-wisdom aspect that reminds me that it is okay to be an ordinary person in a highly complex world and that I need not struggle so much to figure things out, I can simply reach out with the “nembutsu/nienfo” (calling on Amitabha Buddha with an open heart) and offer my Body/Speech/Mind with sincerity and gratitude (Buddha remembrance is mindfulness!). This need not seem intricate or complicated. With “Namu” I arouse humility and acknowledgment of my simple humanity and with “Amida Butsu” I invoke and thank the wisdom and compassionate nature that is light and life infinitely pervading beyond all obstacles and all notions.

I cannot understand it as much as I would like but I am going with a gut (or rather heart) feeling. When I call, say, whisper, chant, cry, and laugh the ‘nembutsu/nienfo’ it is not with an idea of “now I am going to be enlightened” there is just this:

Namu Amida Butsu! Namo Amitofo! Namo Amitabha!

And I am awake not out of my own to do. I have applied to the finest life insurance policy, no worry, just Amida, the cup and the tea and me and... just Amida ~:).

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