

The Dharma Banners Series 6

【法幢集6】習禪三部曲之三
A Trilogy of Ch'an — Part 3

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Tapping
The Inconceivable

Lectures On Buddhism for English Meditation Class
at Chuang Yen Monastery, N.Y.
(紐約莊嚴寺英語禪坐班講錄 Ā)

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毘盧出版社 敬印
Vairocana Publishing Co., Ltd.

Tapping the Inconceivable

First edition

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Printed in Taiwan, R.O.C.

Distributing Centers:

Mahā-vairocana Temple

Vairocana Publishing Co., Ltd.

15, Alley 6, Lane 4, Fu-Hsing Rd., Taipei, Taiwan 116, R.O.C.

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ISBN 957-9373-16-7

DEDICATION

Namo Buddha, Namō Dharma, Namō Saṃgha.

May all the Multibeings
Have all their good wishes fulfilled
And attain the Supreme Bodhi
As soon as possible.

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Chapter 1:

The Eight Afflictions

(八苦)

Whenever the Buddha made a sermon or lecture to his disciples, there were almost always some events or occasions calling for the necessity of, or forming the background for it. Therefore, the Buddha did not choose his subjects at random or arbitrarily.

Some of you are aware of the fact that Rev. Sheen Jay is in the hospital and will soon be undergoing a surgery to have her ovarian cyst removed. Therefore, I would like to make the Buddha's Doctrine of "the Eight Afflictions of This World" the subject of today's lecture.

The Eight Afflictions

According to the Buddha, “the Eight Afflictions of this World” are:

1. Birth
2. Senility
3. Illness
4. Death
5. Parting with the beloved
6. Meeting with the hated
7. Yearning for the Unobtained
8. The Scorching of “the Five Aggregates”

1. The Affliction of Birth

Ordinary People look upon birth as a *joyous* event, an occasion for celebration. To the Buddha, however, this is an incorrect thinking—quite to the contrary, Birth is something painful, rather than joyful. It is painful not only to the mother, but also to the infant. By “the Affliction of Birth” the Buddha is not just referring to the mother’s affliction and pang in pregnancy and giving birth, but also to the child’s pain and discomfort in the same period. Ever since the fetus is formed, it is confined in the womb; it is always in a cramped position within a very limited space, and totally without light. The fulfillment of the fetus’ needs depends entirely upon the body of the mother. As

the mother reclines, or walks, the baby is subjected to all sorts of discomfort. When the mother walks fast, the baby feels like its “ship” is being tottered in a stormy sea. And when the mother runs, it feels like encountering an earthquake.

At childbirth, both the mother and the baby experience tremendous pang: The mother, in addition to having undergone almost ten months of pain and inconvenience, must suffer the lacerating pain at delivery. Psychologists and biologists have determined through their experiments that, to the mother, the pain of childbirth is the highest degree of pain (the 13th degree) that a human being can ever endure. However, for the baby, the pain is nothing less. It is, so to speak, to be “expelled” from its “home” into the cold, harsh, alien space of the external world. That is why, some philosophers argue, when a child is born, it cries when it first meets with the world. Some physicians, however, interpret that it cries in order to exhale and inhale fresh air. Nevertheless, the philosopher contends, if birth is pleasant and to be in the world is sweet for the child, why does it not smile or laugh for exhaling and inhaling instead of crying? Of course, this may sound like a cynical conjecture, but it may just as well convey some crude truth.

The process of birth is also full of vital dangers, to both the mother and the child. Before this century, the most common cause of death to women was childbirth, and many children

died at birth also. For this reason, in Taiwan, lots of Buddhists “commemorate” their own birthdays as “Mother’s Afflicted Day.” On that day, for commemoration, they would do the Buddhistic Fast (that is, eating nothing after lunch until the next morning), or chant *Sūtras* (Buddhist Holy Scriptures), or perform some Buddhist practices, and they will dedicate the Merits of their practice to their mothers—or even to all mothers.

As Birth is painful, “But most *Multibeings*,” the Buddha said, “are so perverted that they should come to think of *painful* things as *pleasurable*.” Due to this *perverted thinking*, most people only celebrate the occasion of their births, without thinking an-inch deeper about it. If we can become awake from the naïve dream of ignorance that Birth (or life in general) is sweet, we will not be so *attached to* life, and as a result, we will be freed from the anxieties, anguishes and lusts in life gradually, and eventually become totally Liberated to attain Buddhahood.

2. The Affliction of Senility (Old Age)

Old Age is much easier to comprehend as an Affliction than Birth is, for all of us can see the Afflictions of old age besetting old people around us. Those who are old usually have a common fear—that they will soon depart both from this world and from those whom they love dearly. Besides, in old age, people suffer from deterioration of all sorts both in the body and in the

mind, especially the inconvenience in moving around. Old age is, indeed, a great ordeal for people to go through.

3. The Affliction of Illness

People must cope with all sorts of diseases or illnesses. No matter how healthy or strong we are now, from time to time we may fall ill and, therefore, suffer from pain and discomfort. According to the Buddha, the number of illnesses that people suffer from is as many as eighty-four thousand. Besides, people are totally equal in terms of getting ill, no matter how rich or poor, how wise or stupid, how noble or base they are.

4. The Affliction of Death

You may sometimes hear some people say that death is good, for, they contend, some people look so peaceful and liberated when they die. But it is not so! The Buddha tells us that, at death, we suffer enormously because at that moment the organism of our physical body begins to fall apart. There are *Four Elements* of which our bodies are composed of: *Earth, Water, Fire, and Air*. And these Elements start to change their normal ways and quit functioning at the time of Death. First of all, as we stop breathing, *the Air* stops circulating in our body. Instantly the space of the body is muffled up and gets stifled and

it begins to smell and stale for lack of oxygen. Secondly, *the Water* or the fluids of our body, namely, the blood, urine, phlegm, etc., then stops circulating and begins to curdle up and congeal, just like milk turning sour. After that, *the Fire* (or the source of our bodily temperature and energy) begins to cool down, and the body turns cold. Finally, *the Earth* (the flesh, fat and tissue, etc.) begins to dissolve, deteriorate, and decompose. In the process of all these physical avalanche transformations, we would experience an awfully deep, and tremendously “unutterable” pain. The most terrible pain, however, is the departure of *the Cognizances* (or Consciousnesses, or Mind in general) from our body. In order to imagine how painful this departure is, one would only need to remember that, during life, everything felt or done comes from the functioning of our *Eight Cognizances* (the Mind). Therefore, the Cognizances spread and cover all over our body, and the Body and Mind, as it were, have become an inseparable integrated whole. If we are pricked at the foot by a nail or thorn, we will feel a sharp pain—that is because the *Tactile Cognizance* in the skin “takes the hurt.” But that is only one little spot that’s got hurt. However, at the moment of death, *all* of our *Cognizances* begin to depart from our body, and that surely causes excruciating pains—which, according to the Buddha, make us feel as if we were being impaled by ten thousand arrows in the heart at the same time! The reason why some people look peaceful at death is only because they cannot

express with their facial muscles the great pains that they are undergoing—for they have lost the control over their tissues.

The pain at death continues for about eight full hours for most people, because it normally takes eight whole hours for the *Cognizances* to withdraw from the body completely. Therefore, according to the Teaching of the Buddha, it is better after eight hours that we move the remains of the deceased—and only after that period of time is a person *truly dead*. If we move the body prior to that time, we would be inflicting some extra pains to our beloved. During those eight hours, we should pray for the deceased, read *Sūtras* to him, or even talk to him about wisdom from the Holy *Sūtras* so as to encourage him to follow the *Bodhi Way* rather than stay attached to this world.

5. The Affliction of Parting with the Beloved

During our lifetime, we would need to leave home and part with our loved ones and friends once in a while. And those are always difficult times. But the “Parting” that the Buddha means here is the Final Parting: i.e., the Parting at Death. In addition, in this whole wide world the most beloved thing to us is nothing but *this physical body of our own*. At the time of death, we have to part with our most dearly loved body; therefore, among all the partings, this is the most terrible one for us.

6. The Affliction of Meeting with the Hated

Due to our *Karmic Relations*, more often than not, we would meet with those whom we detest, which is a very painful thing. But here again, the things that are most hateful to us are the *Reincarnation* into the “*Three Vile Realms*” (the *Purgatory*, the *Hungry Ghostkind*, and the *Animalhood*) in the next life. For, needless to say, every one of us would definitely like to go to a nicer place in our next life; and it is so contrary to our wish that we would be forced to go to a place of the lower level, which is a terribly painful thing. And this is also the deepest meaning of *the Affliction of Meeting with the Hated*.

7. The Affliction of Yearning for the Unobtained

All of us have a lot of goals or aims for our life. However, more often than not, we cannot attain all of them. And the yearning for acquiring something or getting something done can cause people much anxiety, anguish, and pain, and sometimes make people fall ill, too. Indeed, the yearning to fulfil a life’s dream, without little chance for realization, or to execute a project with little hope of achievement—these are very painful things for people in this world.

8. The Affliction of the Scorching of *the Five Aggregates*

The *Five Aggregates*, or *Skandhas* in Sanskrit, simply put, stand for our Mind and Body. All the other Seven Afflictions mentioned above arise from these *Five Aggregates*. Therefore, this Eighth Affliction is, so to speak, the sum total of the preceding Seven Afflictions. The *Five Aggregates* are:

1. Matter (or the physical)
2. Perception
3. Deliberation (or the faculty of distinguishing)
4. Kinesis (or Volition and Operation)
5. Cognizance (or Consciousness, i.e., the Eight Cognizances)

The first *Aggregate* is of the physical or material, and the following four *Aggregates* are mental ones. Among the mental *Aggregates*, the last one, the *Cognizance*, is the *main corpus* of the Mind (which is also called the “Sovereign of the Mind”), while the rest of them (the second, third, and fourth) are the *Cortege* or the *Application* or functions of the Mental Sovereign.

The purpose that we study and practice Buddhism is to transcend, or to liberate ourselves from, the above-mentioned *Eight Afflictions*. But how can the Transcendence be feasible so long as we possess the physical body? Lao Tzu, the first important Chinese Taoist, said, “The reason why I feel pains is because I

have this *body*.” However, quite to the contrary, the Buddha said, “The reason why I feel pain is due to the *Mind*.” What the Buddha means is this: The body is of the Matter; it does not incorporate Perception or Sensation, and so it cannot feel a thing *by itself*—Yet *the Mind does*: Perception, Sensation, and Deliberation, etc., are the domains of the Mind. The highest means to ultimately transcend the *Eight Afflictions* is to achieve the Wisdom of realizing that all the *Dharmas* (phenomena) are *never born and never die*; they never actually arise and pass away; *what is actually happening is nothing but fleeting illusions*. And we need to realize this in the light of the *Tathāgata Repertory*, or *Tathāgata-garbha*. *Tathāgata* means “thusness” or “suchness”—the true state of all *Dharmas*. And *garbha* means “treasure” or “store.” Together, *Tathāgata Repertory* means “the treasure house of Tathāgata” (or Buddha Nature), which all *Multibeings* share in common.

In order to surpass the *Eight Afflictions*, we need to transcend those *Dharmas*; and to do this, the first step is to *view* the *Dharmas disinterestedly*. The “disinterestness” may mean either figuratively or literally. If you are able to *detach* yourself from the situation that you are involved in, you may be able to perceive it with a disinteresting eye. However, if you become deeply involved in a situation, then you would not be able to perceive and comprehend the situation lucidly—for your sight of viewing is veiled by your own sentiments or emotions.

Thus, the first thing we need to do is to *transcend the Dharmas* (extract ourselves from the *Dharmas*) so that we can perceive the *Dharmas* from a higher point of view. When one is *withdrawn* from the situation, one would come to see that actually the situation is not as what it seemed to be, or what you thought it to be, or that actually nothing really significant was happening, or even that nothing really happened. For when we are withdrawn, our mind becomes quiet, serene, and clear. And at such moments, our *Tathāgata Repertory* (or Buddha Nature) would manifest itself to us. *The Buddha Nature is like a mirror and everything that is happening are just like images reflecting on the mirror.* Therefore, all the *Dharmas* are like images upon the mirror of Buddha Nature—although they are only images of no substantiality, the illusions are still there!

【QUESTIONS and RESPONSE】

QUESTION: “Are you, in effect, saying that in order to transcend the *Eight Afflictions* we should live in the world but not be of the world, that is, not attached to it?”

RESPONSE: “Yes, that is what I mean. By the way, that is the *Bodhisattvaship* practice as well. *Hinayānic* practitioners,

however, do not discern, or perceive the *Buddha Nature*; they do not view things as *Unborn and Undestroyed*. As a result, they feel that this world is a truly terrible and unbearable place from which they hasten to flee.

“There are three good ways to surpass the *Eight Afflictions*. First, we should realize that, as Multibeings, we all have some *Inverted Views*. Because of our Karma of Ignorance, surprisingly we would usually view *Afflictions* as *good*. In Taiwan, for example, *old age* is considered very good. An elder person is generally respected and treated very well. They are considered wise due to their experience in life. There is a saying in Chinese, ‘A person without white whiskers cannot get anything done well.’ This explains how Old Age is traditionally venerated in China. Another instance is that, in all cultures, *Birth* is considered as a joyful event. Even *Death* is sometimes wrongly considered as a blessing (like ‘a blessing from God’), or a ‘Release from suffering.’ Thus, common people have come to view *Afflictions* as good for various faulty and elusive reasons. Contrary to the ordinary people, at the other extreme, the Hinayānaists would view all the *Afflictions* as defiled outcomes and they would strive to escape from them by all means.

“A genuine Bodhisattva, however, does not consider any of these things as either good or bad—they are merely viewed as *Phenomena*. The use of the terms of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ results from our *Differentiation* and Judgment of the Phenomena, based

on our liking or disliking. If there were no Differentiations and Judgments, the Phenomena won't be labeled as good or bad. So the 'goodness' or 'badness' of anything only dwells in our own mind, *not in the external Phenomena*: something can be good for you, but it can be bad for others (as the saying goes, 'someone's meat can be another's poison'). Furthermore, one thing can be good for you at present, but it may become disagreeable for you in the future. Besides, it can be honored here in this country, but it may be hated in another one. Therefore, if you are able to perceive the *Phenomena* as *ultimately divorced from any judgments or Differentiations*, at that point, you would be like, so to speak, 'residing in the air, detached from everything.' Many people misunderstand the *Middle Route* of the Buddha; now this is the Middle Route, which is like hanging in the mid-air, ***unattached to anything***. Bodhisattvas, by following this *Middle Route*, are able to perceive the Reality of all the *Spheres* and to undertake everything for all Multibeings. And all these are done due to Compassion."

QUESTION: "Can you protest the building of a nuclear plant and still feel that you are detached from the protest you are making?"

RESPONSE: "Yes. You are protesting, not just for yourself, but for all people, and all *Multibeings*, because a nuclear

power plant is in many ways harmful for all beings, animated or inanimated. You are able to do this in a *detached* manner, because you have witnessed the *Original Nature*, and know that there is actually No Dying, therefore you are not afraid of the illusion of Death, but still you protest because you feel *compassionate toward those who have not come to this Transcendental Wisdom* and still fear death, the cause of death, the process of dying, and the results of their death. Therefore, with such clear consciousness you are *detached from the sentiments*, but you still protest.”

QUESTION: “We can protest what happened to the water in Alaska in any way that we wish, but we cannot change what happened.”

RESPONSE: “What happened is the result of our Common Karmas. Collectively, we have done wrong in the past and now we must correct the situation as best as we can. In the *Mahāyāna* tradition, we do not try to escape from problems as some hermits do; rather, we will try to do what we can to solve them. However, we would not act in a frantic manner; instead, as good Mahāyānic Buddhists, we should cope with it all coolly, wisely and in a civilized strategic manner. And in so doing, we would be at once *engaged* but *detached*.”

—Lecture given on 4/8/1989
at Chuang Yen Monastery, N.Y.

Chapter 2:

Meditation on the Eight Afflictions

(觀八苦)

As I have said previously, the most precious feature of Buddhist practice is flexibility; so that we may adapt ourselves and our practice to the circumstances that we are in at the present moment. There are no hard and fixed rules in practicing Buddhism; the rules are made according to the circumstances. Thus, Buddhist practitioners should be *perseverant*, but not *inflexible*.

As you may know, Reverend Sheen Jay has now returned from the hospital and we know that the cyst was benign. Before her surgery, Reverend Sheen Jay was calm and confident

that all would go well. Buddhism is a “philosophy” that will tide you over the bad times. Although I was very concerned about Reverend Sheen Jay, yet the worry did not last long. That was because both she and I had the recourse to the highest wisdom that the Buddha has taught, which is: “Nothing has ever been born and nothing will ever die.” Nothing has ever really come into being and nothing has ever been really destroyed. All *Phenomena* are illusive and unreal. Everything is of *One Form*, which is sometimes called *Vacuity*, or “*Śūnyatā*” in Sanskrit. All of these *Dharmas* arise from the *Buddha Nature* which is not subject to fickle changes or destruction like the illusive *Dharmas*. However, our Mundane Eye could not perceive this truth since we are so much attached to *External Phenomena*. Consequently, the Buddha says that we all *suffer for nothing*—for everything is illusory. Contemplating on these profound teachings, both Reverend Sheen Jay and myself were able to overcome anxiety and fear to a very great extent.

At our last session, I had mentioned Reverend Sheen Jay’s operation and used that event to introduce the *Eight Afflictions* to you. Today we will make use of the knowledge which we acquired last time and proceed to do the meditation upon the *Eight Afflictions*. The first meditation will be upon the *First Affliction*—the *Affliction of Birth*. I said last time that during birth, both the mother and the baby suffer from enormous pain, and the mother’s pain in childbirth is the greatest pain that a

human being can ever endure. The Buddha says that we are *inverted* for the fact we usually choose to ignore and forget about the pain of the mother and the child and, instead, we tend to focus our attention upon the “joy” of a new-born child. What is more, we even treat pain as pleasure, and pleasure as pain.

Of the *Eight Afflictions*, the first one—the *Affliction of Birth*, and the *Fourth* one—the *Affliction of Death*, are the most important ones. Death is, of course, a crucial subject in meditation. Actually what we wish to transcend very much is Death—the most formidable thing in our life.

We will begin our meditation by concentrating upon *Birth*. Try to visualize the fetus from the moment of conception, through all the stages of its development, culminating in its birth. Now try to imagine the development of the embryo—the formation of the head, limbs, body, hair, etc. It is interesting to note that, two thousand years ago, before the development of modern medical and anatomical science, the Buddha had already delineated distinctly and in detail all the stages of the development of the fetus by the period of seven days. And He even gave special names to each of these periods. Now try also to visualize the discomfort that the baby feels while it is in the womb. For example, when the mother runs, the baby feels as if there was an earthquake. When the mother drinks something cold, the baby feels it is being frozen. When the mother drinks

or eats something very hot, the baby feels as if it were set on fire.

Next, visualize the birth of the fetus and the pain that both the baby and the mother feel at childbirth. Imagine the discomfort of the baby as it is brought forth into the cold air and the strong, stimulating light of the outer world.

Then, imagine that you yourself are that baby. Visualize yourself going through all those stages of existence and growth: embryhood, fetushood, infanthood, childhood, teen-age, adulthood, middle age, and old age. Next, visualize the person becomes ill and racked with pains—envisage the pains and ailments that he suffers from. Then, lastly, comes the visualization upon Death—but we are not going to do this part at today’s meditation.

Before we begin our *Visualizations*, we must practice *Samātha* first, by counting or watching our breath so that our mind will become tranquil, stable and concentrated, and our Mental Eye is wide open and clear. When you count your breaths, count only at the inhalations, but not at the exhalations. If you should lose count, do not try to recall what number you were on just now—simply start all over again from “one.” When you have become skilled in the Breath-Counting, and your mind has become tranquil due to the power of Counting, you will be ready for the second step. Now instead of count-

ing, you will *watch* your breath by focusing your attention on your nostrils and watching the breaths coming and going just as if you were a guard at a castle gate. Just as a guard must be very vigilant and observant in watching all the people coming and going out of the gate of the castle lest some trouble-makers should enter the city; in the like manner you will watch your breath vigilantly. You will be so watchful to the extent that you know practically *every cubic inch of your breath coming or going out of your nostril*, just as if each cubic inch of incoming or outgoing air were a person at the airport that has to be checked gingerly by the customs or immigration. Ultimately speaking, you are virtually a guard, guarding the “door of your life.” And so, in this vein you will watch the most vital element of life coming and going through your nose, which sustains your life. After this contemplation has been done well, you will proceed to do the *Visualization on Birth*, as well as the *Affliction of Birth* in the next stage of practice.

[Meditation Begins]

[After the Meditation]

【QUESTION and RESPONSE】

QUESTION: “I found that, for most of the time that we were meditating, I was concentrating upon my breath. Only towards the end of the meditation session did I begin to concentrate upon ‘Birth.’ Am I correct in assuming that there is no time limit that I should concentrate upon by breath until I feel ready to begin the concentration upon ‘Birth’?”

RESPONSE: “Yes, you are correct. You can take all the time that you need to get yourself ready for the Visualization *per se*.”

QUESTION: “When a baby dies at childbirth, does it mean that its ‘spirit’ chose not to come into this life at this time? Did it decide that it would rather return at a later time?”

RESPONSE: “Both *Karma* and *Volition* have a role to play here; but at this stage, *Karma* has more to say on the decision. Usually it is out of the control of the baby at this point. For instance, if someone takes drugs, it is their choice to do so at the first time—volition is the chief determinant in the beginning. Once they have become addicted to the drug, however, it is out of their control; they will be pushed by ‘the Torrent of *Karma*.’ Therefore, at first, the person himself formed his own decision on the *Karma* he is going to perform, and then in turn

the *Karma* will be in control and will be carrying him forward willy-nilly. Thus, in the beginning he is the ‘*Mover*,’ or the initiator of his *Karma*, but later on, his Karma will come to claim and sway him and he will be reduced to be *the Moved*. This is true of everything that we do—and even true of Life and Death. Even though sometimes we make a choice about where we will be born, but most of the time everything seems to be beyond our control and we are pushed along by some incomprehensible power.

“Let me use another example: it is something like we are going to take a train with our own free will. Once we are aboard, it would not be very easy to get off the train if it does not stop. We could jump off, of course; but that is a very jeopardous thing to do. And so we are, as it were, temporarily trapped on the train, until the train stops—And this train is *the Train of Karma*. If we apply the brakes hurriedly, because the train is running so fast, it may cause tremendous frictions, and create terrible squeaking noise, even jolting and jouncing along with the shrill sounds—it may even result in derailment or accidents, not to speak of the discomfort, fear, and danger for the passengers. This is just the situation in which the Buddhist practitioners find themselves; they become consciously aware that they are on a *Train of Karma*, and that they wish to get off *the Train* very badly. The strong velocity and unchanged direction of the Train is compared to the Karmic Force. For the serious practi-

tioners, the *Dharma* is likened to the ‘brake,’ and the joltings and frictions of the train are analogous to the conflicts and difficulties that they encounter in trying to alter their hardened *Karmic Habits*.

“Most people, however, are *unaware* that they are on board of *the Train of Karma*. Instead, they feel that they are sitting still and are not moving at all, yet they are actually hurtling down the Track of Karma at a tremendous speed! Consider this: we are standing upon the face of this Earth and everything seems to be immobile and so peaceful. The Earth, however, is moving at an incredible speed around the Sun and simultaneously revolving itself at about the same speed. Likewise, everything in the Universe, from the tiniest microcosms down to the hugest macrocosms, is moving swiftly along like going crazy—nothing ever stands still for even a single *Kṣaṇa* (instant). Consider also that the Solar System is moving at an unimaginable speed in this Galaxy, and the Galaxy in a body is also moving at inconceivable speeds across the Universe. Yet, it is so miraculous that due to the power of our *Common Karmas*, we can be all sitting or standing here, feeling, seeing, and knowing virtually nothing about all these terribly violent movements! This is called ‘*Collective Karma*’ or ‘*Common Karma*’ —because of what we all did before, we share the same outcome of the *Karmas*, we share this same Earth and this same Universe and have the same blind *Unawareness*, which is also called

Nescience or Ignorance.

“Now let’s come back to your question. Even if the child in your question wanted to stay in the womb of the mother and be born at this time, and wanted to grow up with that family, but due to some of his past *Karmas*, it might turn out to be out of his control—it is not for him to decide at this time. His previous *Karmas* will decide that matter for him. The shortness of life span is usually the result of previous *Karmas* that involve too much killing or harming: If you had cut other people’s life short by violence, in return, your own life would be cut short. In other words, *like Cause, like Effect* (the same *Cause* of *Karma* produces the same *Effect*). Take for instance, if you had donated generously in your previous life, you would be well off financially in this life; if you used to share your knowledge with others in previous life, you will be a knowledgeable person in this life—those who give away money, will get money in return; those who give away wisdom, will acquire more wisdom in return. By the same token, if you protected the lives of others in your previous lives, then you will be able to enjoy longevity in this life. Therefore, we would say that although it is really pathetic to see an infant die unborn, or become short-lived, but in the light of *Karma*, we need to know that nothing really is **unfair** or **accidental**: everything happening in life is the *Effect of the Karmas* done by the people in question. If we can perceive things in this light and be fully conscious of it, we

will be able to transcend the pathetic feelings, and **would not blame Heaven, people, god, or fate**—*the only one that is to blame is ourselves* who are the performers of our present and previous *Karmic* actions. With such comprehension, we should from now on be resolved to reform our own *Karma*, so as to have a better life.”

QUESTION: “In this life, it is not unusual to see two different people, one of whom says, ‘I never want to come to this world again!’ and another, who says, ‘I would like to return to this life.’ What makes them different?”

RESPONSE: “First of all, you need to know *who* is speaking. If they are both practitioners of Buddhism, then the one who does not wish to return either has not practiced enough, or has not practiced Mahāyāna Bodhisattvaship. If he has not practiced well enough, then he still has many *Attachments* to this world. Therefore, he wishes to return to this world again. If he has practiced Hinayāna Buddhism, then he is still egocentric and does not wish to endure all the worldly *Afflictions* for the practice of the Supreme Bodhi; therefore, he does not wish to return.”

QUESTION: “To return or not return, is that a matter of will?”

RESPONSE: “There is a difference between will and abil-

ity. We all wish to continue living a longer time, but that is out of our control—illness or an accident may terminate our life. On the other hand, should we wish to die and even attempt suicide, if it is not yet our time, we will be even unable to die. The point is that we are *not free to die or to live*, to return or not to return.

“The practice of Buddhism can help us accomplish this *Freedom*. After attaining Enlightenment, if you make a choice between these two options, you will be capable of carrying it out. In China and Taiwan, both in ancient times and even nowadays, there are quite a lot of Masters and advanced practitioners, who are able to know beforehand on what day they would die, and they even can decide for themselves the exact time of their departure. And these cases are far from unusual; in fact, this has been happening innumerable times throughout the ages in Buddhist history. And this is called *Freedom in living and dying*. To these practitioners, their *Karma* is so purified that it is called ‘White Karma’; therefore there was no more hindrance between their Karma and their free will.

“There is a famous story of a Ch’an Master who once gathered all his disciples together in order to tell them that he would die in three months’ time. He exhorted his disciples to practice as hard as usual even if he would be gone. The disciples, however, did not actually believe that their Master would be leav-

ing them so soon, and so a few days later they cleanly forgot about what he had told them. Three months later, he summoned his disciples again and reminded them of what he had said. He then told them that ordinary people die lying down, and ordinary practitioners usually choose to die in sitting meditation posture. He asked if any one of them had ever heard of someone dying while standing on his head—none had. ‘I’ll show you how it is done,’ said the Master. At this, he stood on his head and, while doing so, he passed away.

“Another Ch’an Master gathered his disciples together and said, ‘Today I am leaving this world, make sure that you practice hard and remember all that I have taught you.’ At those words, he closed his eyes and passed away immediately. His disciples, disregarding what their Master had told them, began to weep or cry aloud mournfully for their loss. After an hour or so, suddenly the Master opened his eyes again and reproached them severely, ‘What are you crying for? If you are genuine practitioners you should not view Death as evil and act like commonplace people. No more crying! I’m leaving; don’t let me down again.’ He then closed his eyes again and died a second time.

“This is freedom! The freedom in coming and going at will.”

QUESTION: “Then the way we feel about life and death is a form of weakness?”

RESPONSE: “No, it is not weakness: It is only Ignorance. It is because you don’t understand what the true state of things is. You don’t understand that all these *comings and goings* are just like actors putting on their makeups and costumes and performing the different roles. Even though the costumes and the roles are different, still, it is the same actor—the same person ever. We have been acting different roles throughout eons of ages. But we have never come to realize that point because we are so deeply *involved* in the present role that we have forgotten about our True Selves and about everything else.”

QUESTION: “Is it true that, according to Buddhism, a child can pick who his parents will be?”

RESPONSE: “It is partly his choice and partly the result of his Karma. Apparently he seems to make a choice, but actually it is the force of his Karma that *drives* him to his birth-place. For instance, if you are used to drinking a lot, you are naturally *inclined* to go to a place that sells liquor, such as a bar or pub, and you feel comfortable in that vicinity. Your decision to go there appears ostensibly to be a *choice* of yours, but actually that is no choice of your own at all, in the true sense of the word.”

QUESTION: “Then our Karma determines the circumstances of our life?”

RESPONSE: “Yes. Unless, due to some other fortunate circumstances, you begin to be exposed to Buddhism and begin to practice. The moment you begin to practice, *the structure of your Karma* will start changing and *restructuring* itself. When the new structure of the good Karma is established, the pattern of your Karma will be different, and the total outlook of your life and fate—and even death—will be different. It means that you may begin to live a *less ignorant, less egoistic, less attached life with more generosity, more Forbearance, and more wisdom*. Furthermore, you may die a totally different death: instead of dying young, you may enjoy a long and fruitful life; instead of dying of cancer or other terrible disease in great pain, you may die peacefully in meditation; instead of dying in some accident, or calamity, you may die a death without fear and panic.

“In China, there are many different ways of foretelling the future. Fortune-telling, to me, seems to be somewhat like statistics—it is based on countless observations on the pattern of events that have occurred through the ages concerning some types of people. When a person who practices Buddhism goes to a fortune-teller, however, the fortune-teller would not be able to read their future because the pattern of the Buddhist’s Karma has been altered so much that the ‘Fortune’ of that person is changed out of the ordinary predictable track. Therefore, unless you change the pattern of your Karma, you are almost “destined” to remain in ‘the Train of Karma’ and on ‘the track of

Karma.’

“While we are on this Train of Karma, we tend to believe ourselves to have the power to choose and make decisions for ourselves. But in reality our Karma always makes the choice for us unawares. You may think that it is you that ‘chose’ to become a painter, but most of the times it is not so—your Karma has chosen it for you.”

QUESTION: “But didn’t you choose to practice Buddhism?”

RESPONSE: “No. I just liked it. And why did I like it? There is a saying, ‘There is no reason for liking or disliking.’ It is because of Karma. Good or evil, Karma is the greatest power in the whole world—it is even greater than the supernatural power of the Buddha or Saints, for even the supernatural power of the Buddha cannot cancel the power of Karma, or go against it; this is what the Buddha said. Therefore, beware of your own Karmas.”

QUESTION: “People suffer from the *Eight Afflictions* because they suffer from *Ignorance*. Upon Enlightenment, we realize that there are no *Eight Afflictions*. After achieving Enlightenment, why would a person not wish to return again and again in order to experience the great diversity and variety of life? Since they are enlightened, in any rebirth, they will either

be enlightened again or be born enlightened. Thus, why not return?”

RESPONSE: “If you are enlightened, then you do not return just for the sake of your experiencing life’s diversity or variety. You will have come to a point of *Egolessness*. If there is no Ego, you do not cling to anything or desire anything *for yourself* anymore. The sole reason that you return is only to lead *Multibeings* to the Enlightenment that you have the fortune to achieve and enjoy. That is why only a Bodhisattva (or Pu-sa) returns at his free will. Sometimes Pu-sas decide to be born poor. That is an act of Compassion. In this way, the Pu-sa shows Multibeings by his own example that all people, even the most lowly ones, may have a chance to achieve Enlightenment.”

QUESTION: “When a person becomes a Pu-sa, it seems that they go from choosing to accepting. They no longer feel as if they must choose. Is that correct?”

RESPONSE: “Yes, that is correct. Everything is ‘Equal’ to them. ‘Good’ or ‘bad’ is the result of our discrimination according to our tastes, values, past experiences, temperaments, etc. To another person, what we call ‘good,’ they might call it ‘bad.’ Thus, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ vary from person to person, from place to place, from country to country, and from time to time. These values constantly change and there is no perma-

nent set standards for judgment; therefore, to the Buddha’s Wisdom, nothing is Permanent. The Pu-sas perceive things so clearly that they do not possess any biases and are free from all *Attachments*.”

QUESTION: “Does that mean that Pu-sas do not make any judgments?”

RESPONSE: “There are judgments, but their judgments are not the judgments as we know of them. It is, rather *Understanding*. It is discrimination but of a different sort. For example, when a Pu-sa is born in a particular time and into a particular culture, he would then use that very culture’s standards of discrimination and judgment. He would not contradict their customs and tell them that they were all *wrong*; he would conform to the ways of the culture to some extent, due to Compassion. He would know that all discriminations (either his own or others’) were delusive, but at the same time he knows that if he told the people about that, they would be deeply disturbed and become angry. A great Pu-sa knows when others are trying to harm or kill him, but he would not permit this to take place because he does not wish others to commit terrible deeds and suffer from killing him. Therefore, it is out of the question that commonplace people can succeed in killing or murdering a Pu-sa.

“While ‘resurrection’ or other miraculous things—to take

the example of the story about that Master returning to chide his students—is far from unusual in Buddhism, yet in Buddhism we do not emphasize such events at all. The emphasis is on the *real* practice—for instance, how to conquer the *Three Venoms* (Greed, Hate, and Ignorance), how to subdue your Body, Speech, and Mind to good purposes—these are the really important things. If we emphasize the miraculous, then we would become lost very soon. According to the Buddha, *Miraculous Powers* cannot liberate us from *Transmigration*, or *Reincarnation*, because those powers are merely *Phenomenal* which are still within the boundary of *Samsara*—only *Transcendental Wisdom* can emancipate people.”

QUESTION: “Does not political genocide matter?”

RESPONSE: “Political genocide *does* matter and we should attempt to prevent it. As Buddhist practitioners, we should use persuasion, prayer and protests to do it, but we will never employ violence or bloodshed; that is, we do not try to *stop killing by killing*. When Pu-sas see people killing each other, they are moved by Compassion. People, however, do not listen to the Pu-sas; that is why all these bad Karmas continue to recur.

“Buddhism is not a ‘wholesale business,’ but a ‘retail enterprise,’ so to speak. It does not profess to be able to save everyone *all at once*. Rather, it attempts to prepare everyone *individually*. It sees everyone as an *individual* and helps him

accomplish his goal according to his particular taste, temperament, and ability. But this is a very time-consuming and painstaking procedure. Nevertheless, happily and hopefully, in most cases both the teachers and the students in the Dharma have great patience and understanding that can ever be hoped for.

—Lecture given on 4/15/1989
at Chuang Yen Monastery, N.Y.

Chapter 3:
Meditation on the Eight Afflictions*(cont.)*
And
The Four Boundless States of Mind
(四無量心)

(A) Meditation on the Eight Afflictions (Cont.)

Today, we will continue with the *Visualization of the Eight Afflictions*. In doing the *Visualization of the Affliction of Illness*, first of all, imagine yourself visiting a hospital, seeing all sorts of sick people—physically and mentally ill. At this stage you visualize yourself as a visitor, or a doctor, or a nurse, or a relative—taking care of the sick person. Then visualize the sickness destroying the patient’s health and life.

Next, you will visualize the Affliction of Death. Visualize the person lying on his deathbed. Visualize how frightened the

person is, who seems to be aware of the fact that he is dying. Imagine how difficult it is for him to leave his loved ones, his home, and his life. Yet, he knows he must leave. After this meditation has been done, you can modify the *Visualization* and move on to the second stage by visualizing *yourself* as the sick person, and carry out the processes all over again.

The Affliction of Parting with the Beloved can be permanent (as in death), or temporary (as in leaving one's family for a period of time). There are all kinds of partings. This visualization can help one reduce one's attachment to people and sentiments.

The Affliction of Meeting with the Hated is as painful as *the Affliction of Parting with the Beloved*. Undoubtedly, to be forced to associate with people or situations disagreeable to you is very painful. In such visualization, it will enable you to grow disinterested and compassionate to mundane people who keep on **hurting each other blindly**.

For the *Visualization of the Affliction of Longing for the Unobtained*, you can make a review of your own life up to now, and see how many things you wished to accomplish, but for various reasons, you failed to do it. In such a visualization, you will be convinced of the Sacred Truth of Affliction that the Buddha taught, so that you will be gradually liberated from the **Blind Search** for mundane successes.

The last *Affliction*, *the Scorching of the Five Aggregates*, is the summary of all of the *Afflictions*. As a *Multibeing* (or Sentient Being), we are of the *Five Aggregates*—which means, in sum, the Body and the Mind. If we were not in possession of the *Five-Aggregate Body*, we would not suffer from the *Eight Afflictions*. On realizing this, it would be easier for us to detach ourselves from the mundane world, so as to become free. Yet please be aware that this is just the practice of Hinayāna, which is not the Ultimate goal. Therefore, we need to go forward beyond this stage. Once we have acquired this fundamental skill, then we are ready to practice genuine Bodhisattvaship—the cultivation of *the Four Boundless States of Mind*.

(B) The Four Boundless States of Mind

The *Four Boundless States of Mind* are:

1. The Boundless Benevolence (*Maitri*)
2. The Boundless Mercy (*Karūna*)
3. The Boundless Well-wishing Joy
4. The Boundless Renunciation

1. The Boundless Benevolence

When a Buddhist practitioner perceives this world to be full of infinite *Afflictions*, he would no longer be *attached* to it.

However, there can be a defect in this Unattachment. If the practitioner wishes to seclude himself, or escape from this world by hermitizing permanently, in order to evade pain and suffering of the world, then he will not be able to help other *Emotive Beings*. But the primary spirit of Bodhisattvaship Practice is to help other people. Therefore, it would not be sufficient just to learn the skills that you need for yourself to be freed from this world of *Afflictions*. As a Bodhisattvaship practitioner you must also learn the necessary skills to help others to get out of their sufferings. For example, you may learn how to swim in order to save yourself in the water, but that is not enough—you should also learn how to save the lives of others who are drowning.

Therefore, after meditating upon the *Eight Afflictions*, we must go a step further to meditate upon the *Four Boundless States of Mind* of the Bodhisattvas. We will start with the meditation of *Boundless Benevolence*. This meditation involves *visualizing* the world filled with loving-kindness. This is to offset the *reality*: for usually we are full of animosity and aversion in the mind, and we suffer from it a great deal on that account. The purpose of this meditation is to cultivate our willingness to extend happiness to others—The happiness here means both mundane happiness (such as money, medicine, clothing, etc.) and spiritual happiness. Mundane happiness, however, had a limitation, because when people are materially satisfied, it does not necessarily mean that they are also happy

and satisfied spiritually. Mundane materials are merely the basic requirements—Materials alone cannot guarantee the acquisition of happiness. Spiritual Enlightenment is the ultimate goal for Bodhisattvas and the people they help.

2. The Boundless Mercy

The second meditation, *the Boundless Mercy*, involves the willingness to salvage people from pains and sufferings. Since we have already *visualized* the *Eight Afflictions*, we are familiar with the various types of sufferings to which people are susceptible. In this meditation, we will *visualize* people as having been freed from all the *Eight Afflictions*, and all of them are in deep meditation, in all kinds of postures, either sitting or standing. And all of them are in the serene, blissful state of mind, full of *Samātha* and wisdom, at the portal of gaining *Enlightened* at any moment.

We can also do this meditation in some other ways. For example, we can do it geographically. We may first start with our present location—Carmel, New York—visualizing it as free from all *Afflictions*. From here, while still keeping Carmel in mind, we extend the area to all of Putnam County; and from there to all of New York State, then to all of the United States, etc. Finally, area by area, country by country, continent by continent, we will cover the whole world. And still from there, we

will come to take the whole Solar System as the object of our meditation, the Milky Way, even the Galaxy, this Universe, this Buddha World (*the Soha World*) and, finally, even all the innumerable cosmoses and all the Buddha Worlds, in which, in our visualization, everyone is free from all Afflictions.

Once this *Vipaśyanā* (or *Visualization*) is accomplished, there will be no more hindrances for you to be totally compassionate. In that case, suppose “a grain of sand” (i.e. irritation) should get into your Mind, your Mental Eye would not be bothered. However, we have not yet attained that stage of accomplishment; at present our mind is just like our naked eyes—if a grain of sand sticks in our eye, it would cause us great discomfort; likewise, should someone offend us, our “mind’s eye” is greatly agitated and offended. But if we can cleanse our “mind’s eye” through this meditation, then we will be getting closer to the Buddhas—that is, “we will be learning to *abide in the Dharmic Domain*.” If we can spiritually *abide in the Dharmic Domain*, not only will our knowledge be broadened, but also our Compassion will be expanded to a great extent—and that will enable us to embrace more and more Multibeings, and to acquire more and more Buddha Wisdom. If we are deeply immersed in such meditation, it would not be so easy to provoke us to anger any more, for our mind and Karma have been greatly improved in the process of this meditation; i.e., the *Karmic Components* of our Mind have been re-structured.

3. The Boundless Well-wishing Joy

The third meditation is *the Boundless Well-wishing Joy*. When we have accomplished the first two *Visualizations*, we feel joyous, not just for ourselves but for other people. For we are sure that through our vows, our determination and our unflagging efforts, we will be able to benefit innumerable people with the wisdom of *Buddha Dharma*. In this *Visualization*, we can imagine ourselves as the father, and all the *Multibeings* as our children and we will wish all of them well, just like a father would do to their children. Furthermore, we will visualize that due to our *egoless* continuous efforts, the Multibeings will be liberated from all Afflictions and will attain happiness, and for that sole reason we ourselves are full of happiness and joy—for we will rejoice as a parent will do on account of the happiness of his children. The Buddha says in the *Sūtra* that a High Bodhisattva loves all the Multibeings equally and unbiasedly as if each one of them were his Only Child. For he views the Multibeing as his Only Child, he would not grudge them anything; in fact, he is all willingness to give them anything and everything he owns just to make them happy. That's just what a father would do to his beloved Only Child; and it is exactly the same that a Pu-sa (Bodhisattva) would do to the Multibeings. And this is the way to meditate on the Boundless Well-wishing Joy.

4. The Boundless Renunciation

The fourth meditation is *the Boundless Renunciation*. In the first three meditations you are involved with others in order to make them happy. Now we are going to remove ourselves from all of these; that is, to *detach* ourselves even from all those *White Karmas* that we have accumulated. We will mentally withdraw ourselves and look at it all from a distance—*unmoved*, so as to be immersed in even deeper *Samādhi* and *Prajñāic* wisdom. In the first meditation, we were *moved* by kindness; in the second one, we were *moved* by pity; in the third one, we were *moved* by unegoistic joy. Now, we would try not to be moved by anything—we would be standing at a distance from kindness, pity, and joy. But this does not mean that we are going to give up anything or anybody; instead, we simply *view everything in tranquility*. For all of these—be it *Kindness* or *Mercy* or *Joy*—are nothing but ***Dharmas engendered in our own mind***. Therefore, *our mind is*, in a way, *moved by its own Images*. And ultimately speaking, as the *Sūtra* says, *there is not a speck of Dharma to be acquired*. And this is the *Supreme Wisdom*, which will enable a Bodhisattva to surpass any difficulty and hindrance arising in his Mind, and eventually, to attain the *Supreme Enlightenment*. And this has been the Fourth meditation, the meditation on the Boundless Renunciation.

Everything that is occurring or manifesting itself is due to the functioning of *Buddha Nature*—and the realization of this is the *Ultimate Wisdom* of all Buddhas. Since all *Multibeings* share the same *Buddha Nature*, we know from the Buddha’s teaching that eventually all *Multibeings* will become Buddhas—not just for a “Selected Few.” The only difference is that those who are with good *Karmas* will attain Buddhahood sooner, while those who are with poor *Karmas* would take longer time to do it. It is just as the students who are intelligent and study harder and for longer hours everyday will earn their degrees before the students who are dumb and lazy and always put off their studies for some other irrelevant, useless and meaningless engagements.

The *Eight Afflictions* can be a driving force to goad the practitioner to work hard in order to get rid of them. After having accomplished his goal, a Mahāyāna practitioner will proceed to help others to overcome the *Eight Afflictions*, based upon his own successful experience. In order to do this avocation well, he will need to cultivate and expand his *Disinterested Compassion* so that his mind will grow as boundless as the ocean, as wide-open as the firmament.

Now we will start to do our meditation for today. You may continue with the meditation upon the *Eight Afflictions* from the point where you left off last time, and then go on to do the next item.

[Meditation Period Begins]

[After the Meditation Period]

【QUESTION and RESPONSE】

QUESTION: “During the Running Meditation, where should we direct our attention? Should it be directed towards our feet?”

RESPONSE: “Your attention should be directed towards your mind, not your feet. Strictly speaking, your feet are still of the external, and the proper attention of focus for meditation should be on the internal, rather than the external: Anything outside of the Mind is considered as the External. Besides, we are not in the military army and, therefore, we should not be concentrated upon the feet or the steps we take. Since we are meditating, we simply concentrate ourselves upon our own mind.”

QUESTION: “The direction we take in meditation—the type of meditation and the way we go about it is personal, is it not? It must vary from person to person.”

RESPONSE: “That is correct. Buddhist practice is, basi-

cally, a *personal practice*. Although we may as well all sit in meditation together, each individual is distinctly different. Everyone's progress in practice and method of attaining the goal would vary accordingly. There is no regimentation in Buddhism; it does not try to regulate everyone and impose on all a set of unified and hard and fast rules to follow.

“Even within the same *Approach* (or *Dharmic Portal*), there are diverse nuances in technique for different people. Should anyone need help and instruction, I will be available for private talks either after the session or by appointment.”

QUESTION: “Can people transcend *Afflictions* of the body through meditation? Will meditation be helpful or useful for handicapped people?”

RESPONSE: “All of us here are very lucky, for we have no physical impediments so that we can sit regularly in meditation. Those who are physically handicapped may have to practice other methods than lotus-posture sitting meditation. For example: in doing meditation those who are in great pain for some ailments in the physical would not be able to meditate well or concentrate their mind properly. It would be better for them to practice prayer or other devotional practices. They also can learn to read *Sūtras*, chant the Buddha's Holy Epithet, or practice worship—these things will help them even better.”

QUESTION: “When meditating upon the *Eight Afflictions*, should we make only one of them the subject of a Sitting, or should we start at the first and progress to the last at each Sitting?”

RESPONSE: “It depends upon the amount of time available to you. If you do not have much time, concentrate upon one or two of the Afflictions at each sitting. If you have sufficient time, it is best to start from the first and continue to the next. When you become very skilled, you can go from the first one to the last deeper but faster.”

QUESTION: “When we say that something is an illusion—for example, ‘Karma is an illusion’—without realizing it, then the statement is meaningless. Is that not so?”

RESPONSE: “Yes, that is correct. Anyone can say ‘Karma is an illusion.’ If I say, ‘Money is an illusion,’ you might accept that statement. But if you say, ‘A toothache is an illusion,’ and while saying so, you are really not upset by the pain of your own toothache, then you are qualified to say that. If, on the other hand, you are still irritated by your toothache, then you would be only uttering empty words.

“If you are suffering from a heart attack, or if you are dying of cancer, and you still can truly say ‘Everything is an illusion’ and, furthermore, if you do not feel the pain as hateful and irri-

tating, even to the extent that the pain itself stop being painful or unbearable to you; that is to say, for you Pain has become to quit its regular Mundane Attributes; specifically—‘when pains are no pains’—then would you be fully qualified to say nonsensely, ‘All is but illusion.’ ”

—Lecture given on 4/22/1989
at Chuang Yen Monastery, N.Y.

Chapter 4:

The Eight Winds

(八風)

In today's lecture we are going to talk about *the Eight Winds*, also called *the Eight Worldly Dharmas*. These are called the “Worldly Dharmas” because they can subject people to endless *births and rebirths* in this world. Let us look at the following chart:

The Eight Winds

1. The Wind of Gain
2. The Wind of Loss
3. The Wind of Eulogy
4. The Wind of Defamation

5. The Wind of Praise
6. The Wind of Ridicule
7. The Wind of Pleasure
8. The Wind of Pain

There are Six Elements in this world: Soil, Water, Fire, Wind, Vacuity (or *Śūnyatā*), and Cognizances (or *Vijñāna*). The Soil is the lowest level of all the elements, as well as the heaviest one. Strange to say, that which looks lighter and weaker turns out to be more powerful. Thus, among the first four elements, the Wind is the most powerful, for it can move or destroy anything, and without the limitation in space. Besides, it is the source of life for all beings: without Wind (or air), no animated beings or plants can survive.

The reason why I want to discuss *the Eight Winds* with you is because I believe in “practical Buddhism”—Buddhism which we can practice, put to use, and benefit from in our daily life. This, I think, is the most important factor in Buddhism—Buddhism should be useful in our everyday life, not just high-flown “words of theory” or intricate “philosophy.” Furthermore, the practice on the *Eight Winds* is a fundamental practice in Buddhist Doctrines. According to Bodhisattva Nagarjuna, the Fourteenth Patriarch of Ch’an Buddhism in India, “If someone is unmoved by *the Eight Winds*, he would be like a Buddha.”

We call these *Dharmas* “Winds” because, just like the wind, they have the following attributes: they are

1. Light
2. Formless
3. Swift
4. Very strong and powerful
5. Unpredictable and hard to notice
6. Changeable and very fickle

Owing to these attributes, *the Eight Winds* always succeed in their “sneak attacks” on people, just like a hurricane or tornado, and they are perfectly capable of laying waste to *the Fields of Merit* of the practitioner!

The way of Life is something like the wind; no one—even the professional meteorologist—can predict for sure where the wind will blow! And notice that as all the changes in the world’s weather are due to the blowing of the wind; similarly, when the “Wind” of *External Dharma* blows, the “internal weather” in our Mind changes accordingly. Besides, we also have all kinds of “weather” in our mind—cloudy, sunny, rainy, misty, thunder-stormy, snowy, blizzardy, Typhoony, and what not. In order to predict what kind of “internal weather” will occur in our mind, we should be able to perceive in advance the ways of the “External Winds,” as a meteorologist does, so as to predict the “Internal weather.” Winds can be classified into two kinds: “tailwind” and “headwind”—i.e., favorable and unfavorable winds. And the *Eight Winds* also can be grouped under these two categories. The Favorable Winds are the Winds of Gain,

Eulogy, Praise, and Pleasure; the Unfavorable Winds are the Winds of Loss, Defamation, Ridicule, and Pain.

(A) The Wind of Gain

The *Wind of Gain* is a “favorable wind”; for it brings us what we long for and makes us happy. It consists of all sorts of pleasant things that can happen to us, for example, a job promotion, a raise in salary, passing a difficult examination, buying a new house or a new car, etc. These gains can raise us sky high, to the extent that we are exultant or ecstatic about it. To be a good practitioner, we must be aware of these things and be able to confront them serenely. The practice involved here is that when we are in luck or in good fortune, we should not be “too happy” about that; don’t *over-express* your happiness, or exaggerate your success. If you are over-joyed, some people or some “invisible beings” may become jealous of you and start to upset or do harm to you. In times of joyful incidents, if you can still keep calm and modest, and be under control of yourself, your Merits will increase, and nobody can take advantage of your “intoxication” to do any harm to you. Favorable situations are not easy to deal with as they may seem.

(B) The Wind of Loss

The Wind of Loss is an unfavorable wind and it includes all sorts of adversities: the loss of a job, loss of money, marriage, children, an accident, illness, etc. We need to learn to cope with these happenings; however, before we can do that, we should be able to be *aware* of them first. Most of the time, when we are deeply involved in a situation, we are so *attached* and immersed in it that we are almost unaware of what is really happening around us—because the “distance” between ourselves and the situation is getting too close. Our *mental eye* is just like our naked eye: both of them cannot discern when things get too far or too close. We would suffer most at the time when the Winds blow, but we cannot recognize it and are not aware of it; as a result, we would be carried away “unconsciously or unknowingly.” For instance, when we receive a big raise, we are so joyful and so excited that we wish to make a phone call at once to our family, or our best friends, and tell them about our good fortune. The next thing we wish to do is to celebrate. However, at such moments, we should apply some “mental breaks” to it and remind ourselves, “Watch out! ***The Wind of Gain is blowing!***” If we do this, the wind would begin to abate a little bit instantly. Otherwise, it will keep on gathering force and develop itself into a hurricane. And when one is *overwhelmed* by one’s good fortune, one would be very vulnerable and open to big mistakes. That is why, as the ancient Chinese

saying goes, “The higher one ascends, the lower one collapses.”

On the other hand, should we lose our job, we might become despondent or dejected. At that moment, we should be aware and remind ourselves, “Oh! *the Wind of Loss is blowing*—I must be careful not to be blown away by it!” If we can be consciously doing this, it will help in keeping us from being overly depressed as we might otherwise do. Besides, the awareness can also keep us calm and tranquil during times of peril or calamity, and therefore enable us to avoid something fatal or foolish, and even help us in finding a way out. This is the Wisdom about the Winds that can tide us over our difficulties in life.

I am not talking about this as a mere theory. In fact, from time to time, I myself have been greatly benefited by the practice of this Wisdom: I have always tried hard to remain alert and aware of these Winds all the time, so that I won’t fall a victim to them when they show up. Because of our Karmas, we tend to ignore about such Wisdom very easily. Our *Karmic Habits* are so powerful that they frequently pull us away from the *Right Wisdom*; therefore, we must do hard to “pull” ourselves back to the right track again. If, at present, we are unable to reform our habits with ease, then we should apply a little force on ourselves and compel ourselves onto the right path, so that our *Karmic Habits* can be improved gradually.

(C) The Winds of Eulogy, Defamation, Praise and Ridicule

Although among these four *Winds* two pairs of them are fundamentally similar, there are diverse nuances among them.

Eulogy and *Defamation* are “indirect” winds—they are “finer” and more delicate and are done in public. They help to form public opinions and are consequently more widespread in influence.

To the contrary, *Praise* and *Ridicule* are “direct” winds, for they are done directly to our face. And so they are “coarser” and more personal, and their effects are narrower in scope but not weaker. *Ridicule*, however, seems to be exceptionally powerful—since it is a close-range and direct assault.

Note that all of these *Four Winds* have something to do with *words*. Thus, words can either do pernicious damage to people or make wonderful benefits. Therefore we can utilize words either to help or to hurt other people.

I wish to relate a story to you concerning the Buddha and an unsuccessful attempt to denigrate Him. There was a person named Devadatta who considered himself enlightened and an equal of the Buddha. He hated the Buddha because the Buddha has won widespread fame and a large number of followers. Because of his jealousy, Devadatta often attempted to stigmatize the Buddha. Once, Devadatta paid a courtesan named

Sundāri to appear before the Buddha in a preaching assembly, and to accuse Him of being responsible for making her pregnant. In fact, Sundāri tied a washpan to her stomach under her robe. Faking pregnancy in this way, she appeared before the Buddha and called Him the names of hypocrite for preaching others morality, while He Himself had committed adultery in secret and made her pregnant without showing any responsibility.

The Buddha, however, kept silent and did not reply to any of her accusations—He only sat there unmoved. And then Indra, the Sovereign Deity who is the ruler of the *Thirty-three Heavens* and the *Domain of Desire*, became indignant with Sundāri. He transformed himself into a rat, crawled up Sundāri’s stomach, and bit off the string that held the washpan. The washpan fell to the ground and everyone present rejoiced and applauded and cheered at the exposure of Sundāri’s scheme. However, those who applauded and cheered were, for the most part, lay followers. The Buddha and His disciples, as befitting men of great wisdom, sat there unmoved and motionless. (In his writing, Bodhisattva Nagarjuna said that *when the Buddha was slandered, He neither got angry nor upset; and that when He was extolled, He did not rejoice over it.*)

The Buddha then explained to the congregation the reason why Sundāri attempted to defame him. He related that in the past, many many lives ago, there was a gambler called “Clean

Eye” and a courtesan named “Deer Looks.” The gambler Clean Eye invited the courtesan Deer Looks to a picnic in the country. During the picnic, the gambler and the courtesan had a quarrel. The gambler was unable to control himself and, in a fury, killed the courtesan Deer Looks and then buried her body in the hut of a *Pratyeka-buddha* (a practitioner, higher in achievement than an *Arahat* but below the Buddha), who happened to be away in town. Later on, when the body was discovered in the hut, the authorities were going to hang the *Pratyeka-buddha* for the murder of the girl. At that point, feeling repentant for what he had done and sorry for the *Pratyeka-buddha* that he had to suffer for his own crime, the gambler Clean Eye gave himself up to the authorities and confessed all about his crime, and thereupon he was executed for it.

The Buddha then told his followers that the gambler Clean Eye at that time was the Buddha’s previous incarnation and the courtesan was Sundāri. As a result of the wrongs that he had done to her in the past, Sundāri had come to defame him in every life ever since, and even now after He has already attained Buddhahood, she is still trying to revenge by hurting him. And so the Buddha remonstrated the audience to keep away from any wrongdoing as best as they could, otherwise they must suffer from innumerable *Karmic Results*.

The *Winds of Eulogy* and *Defamation* are very powerful. It is due to the fact that *we are always seeking for something ex-*

ternally throughout our life. Yet in the final analysis, ***actually what we are seeking for is not “things” themselves; rather, they are recognitions, fame, praise, prestige, respect or even worship derived from the things gained or activities done.*** The things that we seek for only act as a *means* or decoy to get to what we are really after in the secret niche of our heart. And so we need to be consciously aware of what we are actually seeking for before we can really talk about *Practice, Liberation, and Enlightenment*: because we need to be fully conscious of what our concerns are and *where our problem lies* so as to practice effectively.

In the eleventh century in China, there was a literary genius called Su Dong-Puo, who was a great poet of the premium class. He was also a very knowledgeable Buddhist practitioner. He was befriended to a Ch’an Buddhist monk named Fo-Yin (meaning “Buddha’s Signet”). Su Dong-Puo was a very proud person and always wanted to prevail over Fo-Yin in Buddhist Doctrines and practice; but he always lost in the contest. One day Su Dong-Puo rowed his boat onto an island in Lake Tai, the second largest lake in China, in order to do meditation and compose some poems. During his meditation, Su Dong-Puo believed that he had actually achieved Enlightenment! To commemorate that invaluable experience of Enlightenment of his, he then composed a “Regulated Quatrain” (a Chinese metrical verse form of four-line stanzas). The last verse of the poem was,

“And now am I impregnable
in the face of *the Eight Winds*”

The verse done, he immediately sent a servant to take this poem to Fo-Yin so that his friend might know of his wonderful accomplishment and congratulate on him.

After reading the poem, Fo-Yin put down a brief comment upon the paper: “That’s surely some gust of fart!” And then he had the servant bring the paper back to Su Dong-Puo. Upon seeing this comment, Su Dong-Puo became so furious that he had his boat rowed back across the lake to confront Fo-Yin right away. Angrily he demanded to know the reason why Fo-Yin called the poem and his dearly-won Enlightenment “a fart”! Fo-Yin laughed heartily and replied breezily, “You said that you are unmoved by the *Eight Winds*, and yet the ‘Wind’ of a small fart on the paper is sufficient to blow you across the lake!” This short tale is a very good exemplum for the Wind of Praise and the Wind of Ridicule.

(D) The Winds of Pleasure and Pain

The Wind of Pleasure and *the Wind of Pain* (also called *the Wind of Joy* and *the Wind of Sorrow*) are the summation of the first six “Winds,” for the foregoing six “Winds” are the *causes* and these last two are the *effects*. And among all the “Winds” these two are the toughest ones to cope with.

The most difficult part in Buddhist practice is to apply the knowledge that we have gained in Buddhism to our daily life. To be able to do this, first of all, we need to be always *aware* of the situation or circumstances. We must know clearly what kind of *Wind* is blowing. Usually, we are not only unconscious of what *Wind* is blowing, but also unaware of the fact that a *Wind is* blowing.

After discerning what *Wind* is blowing, we will be able to figure out how strong it is—is it a gentle breeze or is it more like a hurricane or a tornado? We need to apprehend everything concerning this *Wind* so that we can decide what measures to take to deal with this imminent problem.

Having done these, we can try to perceive this *Wind* (or the *External Worldly Dharmas*) by means of the Buddha Wisdom, which can be proceeded as follows:

First, we need to understand that the fundamental ***nature of the Worldly Winds is impermanent***—they will not stay long, for they come and go swiftly. In other words, they are *inconstant*. We do not want to suffer from these *impermanent* things; otherwise we will be going against the *One Everlasting Thing*—our *Original Nature*. We must perceive that *these external happenings are like a dream*: All the *phenomena* in the world are like a dream—and we are the ***dreamers***. Everything is happening in a dream, but the problem is that ***the dreamer never***

knows that he is in a dream, nor is he aware that all that is happening is nothing but a dream! *The dreamer always tries to grasp and possess the things that appear in his dream* and, as a result, he suffers tremendously, for *everything in the dream is intangible and ungraspable*. And Life itself is a big dream, embedded with everyday small dreams. By proper practice, you can be in control of yourself in your “dream” gradually; moreover, you can even know the fact that *you are dreaming* while you are in a dream. That is amazing indeed, but if you practice well and hard, it is far from an unusual thing at all—you can even come to the point of being able to control your behavior, speech, or thinking in your dreams—even to the effect that you can make right judgements and decisions so that you do not commit a sin or do anything wrong in your dream. If this happens, then you are virtually *practicing the Dharma in your dream*. If a person can practice even in his dream, he will be all right: the *Bodhisattva’s Route* is wide-open right in front of him. For in a dream everyone is rendered *consciousless, powerless and hopeless*. In a dream a person is totally at the mercy of his *Karma*, to be drifted blindly anywhere. Under such circumstances if a person is still able to practice, he must have, to a great extent, got out of the domination of his *unconscious Ignorance*, and he must have been practicing for innumerable lives—in fine, he would be on a par with great Pu-sas.

There is a saying that “For the Minor-Vehicle Practitioner,

the test is in the wakeful time of the day; but for Pu-sas the ‘acid test’ is in the dreams.” If your *Ālaya Cognizance* (i.e. your Mind) is so purified that you can even control yourself and avoid committing sins or doing wrongs in your dreams, then it is unlikely that you will do anything terribly wrong when you are awake. Also, if you can control yourself in your dreams, you will be able to control yourself when you are passing away—because “the life after death” is very much like “the life in a dream.” For after death as in a dream, ordinary people would drift upon the *Water of Karma* (or the *Wind of Karma*), **without any free will** at all, simply floating along with our *Karmas*. It is only through practice that we could have a chance to turn this situation around.

In order to deal with the *Winds* well, we should always keep our *Buddha Nature* in mind. We should never forget about it for a moment; ***if we can bear our Buddha Nature in mind, we will be able to perceive that all the Winds are just like phantoms and illusions on the face of the Ocean of our Original Nature.*** It is best that we *neither like nor dislike* the *phantoms*—otherwise we would be running astray from our *Buddha Nature* on that account.

Please contemplate well on this metaphor: ***The Buddha Nature is like a mirror and the Eight Winds are like images appearing upon the mirror.*** You cannot contend that there *are no images* on the mirror; nor can you maintain that there *are im-*

ages on the mirror; and so *the images are all illusions. But the illusions are still visible on account of causes and effects.* We should also remember that all of the *Dharmas* are *unborn and undying*—just like the *images on the mirror*—**those images never really come into the mirror and so they never really go out of it.** Therefore, we should always keep close to our *Buddha Nature*, which is the only thing that can enable us to perceive all these Truths of Reality and help us to acquire eventual *Enlightenment*.

To sum up, it is beyond a doubt that it is also this Wisdom that will enable us to free ourselves from the phenomena of *the Eight Winds*. Nevertheless, *we will not be able to put this wisdom to daily application unless we can practice it in meditation very well. Without the power of meditation, or Dhyāna, we are exactly like seaweeds upon the ocean.* Like seaweeds, we have no roots to the ground and we are being drifted hither and thither by *the tide of Karma* where it chances to flow. Therefore, we must develop our *Meritorious Roots* by means of meditation, which will help our *Merits* to take root in the *Ground* of our *Buddha-Nature Mind*.

[Meditation Session Begins]

—Lecture given on 5/13/1989
at Chuang Yen Monastery, N.Y.

Chapter 5:
To Cope with the Unknown:
The Mystic Power of Buddha Dharma
— Part I —
(佛法之不思議力—之一)

Before we begin our meditation session for today, I would like to tell you a little bit about my trip to Florida. As you may recall, one of the reasons for my trip there was to visit a very sick man (whom I am going to refer to as Mr. K). The nature of Mr. K's illness is more of the mental than the physical: His family told me that he was losing his mind. Recently in the night, he could not sleep and he would exclaim loudly calling out the names of his deceased relatives or friends, or even appear to talk to them, and all the while he would point to or wave

to them, as if they were right in front of him, above him in the air.

This world is a *fantastic* place! It is at once real, and yet unreal. If the world that we see is real, but to a deranged person, our world does not exactly exist for him. Rather, it is the world in his own vision that he takes to be true; it is hardly possible to make him change his viewpoint, and it is out of the question for us to enter into their *visionary* world.

In our last session, before I went to Tampa, Florida, we chanted the *Six-Word Mantra* or *Dhārani*, “Om Mane Padme Hum,” and dedicated the *Merits* of practice to Mr. K. The following morning something fantastic happened: Mr. K’s wife called me up and said that that very night he was already better, and that, for the first time in three weeks, he did not yell as much. I feel that this is the result of the power of our wish for his recovery and the effect of our group chanting of the *Dhārani*. Group practice is generally recognized as very powerful.

When I went to visit them in Florida, I was determined to stay awake all the first night through. Once he should begin to yell, I decided, I would start reciting *Dhāranis* and *Sūtras* for him and for the “beings” he accosted. To tell you the truth, I am not an exorcist and have no such wish to be one, either; however, Mrs. K had nowhere else to turn to for help—the hospital told her that they could do nothing more for him and that

she should take him home, because even after giving him very heavy and continuous dosages of narcotics, they were still unable to put him to sleep for a single night for over two weeks! And his yellings of the deceased's names and his gesticulations—such as pointing and beckoning someone in the air—frightened most of the nurses to death!

Mrs. K had gone so far as to have her family in Taiwan consult a Taoist psychic. The psychic told Mrs. K's family in Taiwan that, while she and her husband were in China recently in order to rebuild the tombs of their ancestors which had been long destroyed by the Red Guards, they did not make any proper offerings—especially food—to the spirits at the graveyard. In addition, since there was no ceremony or formality of any kind, some of the spirits, the psychic said, got very indignant and have followed him back to America, and have been troubling him ever since. This is the cause of his illness, said the psychic. The psychic suggested Mr. K return to Taiwan in order to be treated by him directly, face to face; otherwise, he could do nothing to help him, because they were too far apart. But the suggestion was not practicable, because Mr. K was too ill and too weak to travel—besides the hallucination, he is also suffering from his *fifth* attack of cerebral hemorrhage, which has now caused his hemiplegia (half of his body is senseless).

Partly due to the earnest supplications of Mrs. K, and partly

out of an uncontrollable compassion on my part, I traveled to Florida trying to help Mr. and Mrs. K. Actually, in Buddhism we do not perform exorcism—this usually falls under the province of Taoist priests. While a Taoist’s sole concern is to expel the “evil” spirits; a Buddhist practitioner, in contrast, would try to help the ill person by easing the afflictions of the “evil” spirits so as to reconcile both parties. Therefore, what I did was conducting some rituals and offering the spirits food in the most Orthodox Buddhist manner according to the *Sūtras*. During the first night I did not go to bed at all; I simply sat on the couch in order to keep a close watch on Mr. K. He, however, much to my surprise, did not yell at all the whole night through! What is more, to my very great amazement, for the first time in three weeks, *he slept!* Although he was still muttering occasionally with his hands raised up to the sky, yet that was not too bad; at least it was not so scary. And physically he was improving a great deal. From this experience I become much more convinced that the chanting of *Sūtras* and *Dhāranis* really works!—especially when all the other worldly means are exhausted and there is no other help available.

The following night, since Mr. K looked better, I dozed lightly upon the couch. On the third day, I chanted more *Dhāranis* in order to help him get well sooner. By the fourth evening, he was totally silent throughout the whole night! On the fifth morning, he *totally recovered his senses*, and asked to

be pushed in a wheelchair to the shrine room where I conducted all the rituals, so that he could pay homage to the Buddha and express his gratitude. It was done according to his wish, and what is more, he made a request to *take refuge!* As a consequence in that afternoon, Mr. K and all of his family—his wife, his two sons, and his grandson—took refuge under the *Three Gems*. And all his family have become my disciples.

At that time I felt that although I might have appeased most of the hungry spirits with food and *Dharma*, there might be some other spirits that were too evil and too stubborn to come to terms, and that they might be still lingering around and trying to do harm to Mr. K; therefore, I decided that some further actions were necessary. I chanted for one hundred and eight times a most powerful *Dhārani*, the *Lankavatara Dhārani*, which is very powerful in expelling evil spirits. Usually, I would not employ this *Dhārani*, but since that was my last night there, and that Tampa is so far away from New York, it wouldn't be easy for me to come again. Besides, the K's are far from well-to-do; they would not be able to afford the flight fare for a second time. (It was a totally "free service," apart from the flight fares.) Based on these considerations, and in order to put an end to his *afflictions* once and for all, I decided to use that powerful *Dhārani*.

Indeed, this is a very weird world! For there are a lot of

things that we would not believe to be true unless we have some experience about it. I myself for one have never seen any ghost or evil spirits, but I was determined to save Mr. K even though those spirits might wish to pull me downward to the lowest levels of purgatory!

After the business at the K's, I took a trip to the Buddhist Association in Miami to give two lectures at their request. In the first evening the lecture was in English, and in the second one in Chinese. After the lectures, all the members of the Association, including four Americans, *took Refuge* and asked me to be their Master Teacher—to which I agreed.

My schedule is full and tight for I am teaching in many different places. This, however, is the way of *Bodhisattvaship Practice*—when a certain situation occurs which calls for your help, you cannot turn your back on it no matter what! There is a saying in *Bodhisattvaship Practice*—“You should be always available upon demand.” Whenever someone is in dire need and he comes to you for help, you cannot turn him down unless you have sufficient valid reasons; otherwise, you should offer him your help as you possibly can.

【QUESTION and RESPONSE】

QUESTION: “When you are with people who are in great pain, do you not absorb their pain? I do—and I feel very poorly as a result. A friend of mine is convinced that she is dying of cancer. She refuses to be consoled by me, and I feel very badly about this. I wish to help, but I do not seem able to do so.”

RESPONSE: “You should always be deeply involved, but simultaneously, you need to view your self as *removed* or *detached*. Unfortunately, you were not present last week when we recited the *Six-Word Dhārani* of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, ‘*Om Mane Padme Hum.*’ Surprisingly, that *Dhārani* worked—not just for that person in Florida, but also for another one of my friends. This *Dhārani* has worked for many people in the past.

“Today, we will recite that *Dhārani* for the benefit of your friend and for the benefit of all *Multibeings* who are suffering in any way.

“This world is such a ‘fantastic’ place that many unbelievable and inconceivable things do happen. Why this *Dhārani* works?—I don’t know exactly, to be frank with you. But I do know that it is due to the power of *Compassion* and the transcendental power of Wisdom of Enlightenment of Buddhas and Great Bodhisattvas that make all these work but remain enigmatic to us. Notwithstanding, it works! And I do hope that we

may all nurture the *Bodhisattva Heart* so that we can partake in *the Buddhas' world of the inconceivable* pretty soon.

—Lecture given on 5/6/1989
at Chuang Yen Monastery, N.Y.

Chapter 6:
To Cope with the Unknown:
The Mystic Power of Buddha Dharma
— Part II —
(佛法之不思議力—之二)

I do not mince matters to say that when I first began to practice Buddhism some years ago, I was still not quite sure about the power of chantings and incantations. I thought that chanting may be merely an ingenious invention of some great Masters or Patriarchs, and that its major purpose is to facilitate our practice in Buddhism. But something happened right after my three-year retreat in Dallas, which made me modify my opinion in respect of this.

One day a middle-age woman came to me and asked me for help. She said she was living in her daughter's house. Their neighbor's house was a recently-built new single-family home. But up to then, that house was still uninhabited because it had a foundation problem so serious that one of the walls had developed a large crack from the foundation to the roof. And so it had been vacant for about six months since its completion.

About a month ago, while that lady was taking a nap in her own room in the afternoon, she heard a large number of people bustling about and making a great commotion. It appeared that those people were moving into the empty house next door. At that time, her window was popped open and she heard people coming in and going out through her windows. She kept a little shrine by a window, which contained some pictures of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. While the people were entering and leaving through the window, one of the people was tripped by a picture and knocked it down to the ground outside. At that moment, the woman jumped up and yelled, "What do you think you are doing? You have knocked my pictures down the floor!" Suddenly, she awoke, and looking down outside, she saw one of her pictures lying upon the ground!

At first, the lady was not sure if what she had seen was just a dream or not. But she was perplexed and was a little scared. From that time on, however, whenever she tried to do her Bud-

dhist practice, it turned out that she could no longer do it. For instance, when she tried to chant the Buddha's holy name, something would seem to choke her in the throat so that she was unable to utter a single sound, and if she still tried to chant, foams and broths would be emitted from her throat to cover all over her mouth. And a lot of times, in the middle of her chanting, she would suddenly feel so weak that she could no longer stand on her feet, so that she dropped down on her knees, and eventually she was forced to crawl on all fours across the room to her bed and lay herself down panting tremendously, as if she had been sick for a long long time.

Later on, since she heard that I was a devoted practitioner in a retreat, she supposed that I would know all about these matters. But during the interview, I really could not bring myself to disappoint her by telling her that there was nothing I could do for her—that is, I could not come to the point of refusing to help her. Therefore, at her earnest request, two days later I went to her place and chanted some *Sūtras* and *Dhāranis* and made some offerings. This was the first “exorcist” work that I had ever done. I did not, however, try to expel the alleged “spirits.” Instead, I told them not to bother this lady by promising them the “bribes” or gifts of food and *Dharma*. I also told them that if they wished to live in the neighboring house, they could do so without bothering others. Subsequent to that, I made the offering of food to them as promised, for according to

Buddhist belief, ghosts are usually hungry (hence they are called “Hungry Spirits”). I also chanted some *Sūtras* for the benefit of their Liberation and Enlightenment so that they could transcend the life of Hungry Spirit as soon as possible.

After these were done, I returned home. Since it was already late in the evening, I retired for the night. But before I fell asleep, I saw on the floor, under the picture of Amitabha Buddha, a strip of white light—pure and very bright. There were no other light sources either in the room or from outside, for my blinds on the window were all shut down. I marveled at what I saw, and I knew that this was an auspicious sign which Amitabha Buddha was manifesting to show me that I had done right. And, what about the lady? From that time on, she was no more troubled by those “spirits”! However, as a Ch’an practitioner, I did not make a fuss about it—All’s well that ends well. If a deed is done *purely for the good of others* and if it is *done properly* and whole-heartedly, and, more importantly, if there is *no money or fame involved*, usually it will turn out to be good. And so, without any further look or thinking about the “Buddha’s Light,” I went to bed directly and contentedly, with a faint smile on my face.

At this point, I would like to remind you that the most important thing in Buddhism, however, is not exorcism or some other miraculous deeds. It is, rather, the *cultivation* of Com-

passion for others. If there be such things as “spirits,” that’s OK. But the most important thing is still the cultivation of Compassion for others, only out of which can all Buddha Wisdom come to be realized.

As a result of this earlier experience and of my recent trip to help Mr. K in Florida, I have come to believe that the chanting of the *Sūtras* and *Dhāranis* and even the Holy Epithets of Buddhas do have an inconceivable “mystical” effect. When some problem is beyond human power to solve or remedy, as Buddhists, we still have means to resort to, to say the least, provided that we are sincere and pure and not obstinate.

—Lecture given on 5/13/1989
at Chuang Yen Monastery, N.Y.

Chapter 7:
To Cope with the Unknown:
The Mystic Power of Buddha Dharma
— Part III —
(佛法之不思議力—之三)

Just now, Martin asked me how Mr. K in Florida is doing. I spoke to his wife recently and she said that he was doing quite well, and that, she said, he has completely recovered. Martin said that was amazing.

But I'd like to give you to understand that I am no miracle worker, although quite a few amazing things did happen to me. Recently I received a call late at night. It was from a person

who had attended a retreat here. He is now a student working towards his Master's degree.

The man was in sobs and tears and very upset. His wife, who is pregnant, had taken some medical tests. Her doctor informed her that she probably had an incurable disease called "Mediterranean Anemia." This disease is very common among Thais. His wife used to live in Thailand and is partly of Thai lineage. The man did not know what to do, and then he sought my help.

The man confessed to me that, although he was still quite young, he had made many mistakes in his life. One of his girl friends had even committed suicide because of him. As "Remedial Work," I told him to make a vow to recite the whole book of *The Sūtra of Bodhisattva Terra-Treasure* in three days—by the schedule of one third of the book a day—and he should do it continuously for one full year.

The man agreed to do so as I advised. Two weeks later he called to tell me that the doctor was amazed and quite perplexed, for in the follow-up tests, his wife's disease seems to have disappeared!

Another instance involves an American who used to take courses with me. His girl friend, with whom he was living, tested positively for genital herpes. He was quite upset since, if his girl friend had herpes, he too probably had contracted it. I

told him to recite the *Dhāraṇi*, “Om Mani Padma Hum.” Although he had little faith in the power of the *Dhāraṇi*, nonetheless, he followed my instruction, and a week later when he had a further test, it revealed that the result was negative.

I would say once more that I am not a miracle worker. If they have tried medical treatment first and the doctors found out that their case is hopeless, then and only then, at their request, would I try to help them by advising them what to do. I may tell them to recite the Sūtras, or to chant Dhāraṇis, or to do some retributory deeds, etc. Sometimes, perhaps by coincidence, or perhaps by the powers of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, inconceivable things do happen, and I feel happy for the people blessed by the Buddhas and benefited by the Dharma. As a result, I am all the more convinced in the inconceivable power of Buddha Dharma, and my faith in the power of *Egoless Compassion and Wisdom* as manifested by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas has greatly enhanced.

—Lecture given on 5/13/1989
at Chuang Yen Monastery, N.Y.

Chapter 8:

The Three Refuges

(三皈依)

In our previous lecture, we discussed the power of the inconceivable, which may be one of the most fascinating subjects in Buddhism. However, we need to put off the discussion of this topic for the time being, because, some of the students here asked about the meaning of “*The Three Refuges*,” and I wish to respond to this question right now. Generally, *The Three Refuges* mean for a person to take refuge under *the Three Gems*, or the Three Precious Ones, and to become a Buddhist formally.

The *Three Gems* are the *Buddha*, the *Dharma*, and the *Samgha*. They are called *Gems* because, like gems, they are

the most precious things—for the *Buddha*, the *Dharma*, and the *Samgha* are the most precious of spiritual things in this world. And as precious things these *Three Gems* are hard to come across. The only people that can meet with the *Three Gems*, and then to accept, to practice, and eventually to get benefit from them are the people who have sufficient good Karmas in their past lives and are blessed on that account. Therefore it is hard to encounter and get involved with the *Three Gems*. Also, *the Three Gems* can help us attain *Enlightenment* and to transcend the *Afflictions* of *Transmigration* or *Samsara*.

THE THREE GEMS

I. The Buddha

First, let me explain more in detail about the *Gem of the Buddha*. The word Buddha (बुद्ध) comes from the Sanskrit word बुद्धि (Bodhi), meaning *Enlightenment*. Thus “*Buddha*” means “*one who has attained Bodhi, or Enlightenment.*” To be *enlightened* literally means to be spiritually and mentally awake, so as to become one who “*never falls asleep or dreams anymore.*” There are four kinds of *Bodhi* or *Enlightenment*, called the “*Four Sainthood Enlightenment.*” Ordinary people may

once in a while experience a brief flash of *Enlightenment* that can not last very long. The “*Four Sainthood Enlightenment*,” however, will stay forever—once attained, they are never lost.

The Four Sainthood Enlightenment

The first Sainthood Enlightenment is called *Shravaka Bodhi*. *Shravaka* refers to the practitioners who listened to the Buddha and who practiced directly under him until Enlightenment. These are also called “*The Minor Vehicle*” Saints. Next to them are the *Pratyeka-buddha Bodhi*. Practitioners of this category are also of the *Minor Vehicle* (or *Hinayāna*). The third one is the *Bodhisattva Bodhi*, which is on a higher status than the previous two. All three of these groups of people can attain *Enlightenment*; but the levels of their attainments vary a great deal.

The fourth level of *Enlightenment* is called *Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi*, which means “*Unrivalled, Supreme Enlightenment*.” Usually this is also called the *Ultimate Enlightenment*, for it is the consummate stage of Enlightenment, which enables one to attain Buddhahood. And so this is the Enlightenment that the Buddhas realize. Except for this one, all the other Enlightenment are not final; they are all on the route to the Ultimate goal. What is more, according to Buddha, all *Multibeings* can practice *Buddha Dharma*—Buddhism is not

only for a selected few—*for all Multibeings are innately endowed with the same Buddha Nature*; therefore, eventually everyone will be able to attain Buddhahood if only they practice in the right way, beginning with taking the *Three Refuges* and the *Vows of the Five Precepts*.

The Three Corpuses of Buddha

The *First Gem* is called Buddha because the Buddha has attained the *Ultimate Enlightenment*. His *Manifestations* are called “*The Three Corpuses* (or *Kāyas*).” The first of them is the *Dharmic Corpus* (or धर्मकाय *Dharmakāya* in Sanskrit) which signifies that the Buddha has attained his *Original Nature* through practice of *Dharma*. His whole being is formed by *White Karma*, meaning purified Karma. The second *Corpus* is called the *Retributive Corpus* (or संबन्धकाय *Sambhogakāya*), which means the *Body of Blessings* or the *Body of Virtues*. Due to His innumerable virtues, the Buddha is able to attain this *Corpus* (*Kāya*). The third *Corpus* is called the *Incarnational Corpus* (or निर्माणकाय *Nirmāṇakāya*). For the sake of His great Compassion, the Buddha usually manifests Himself to general *Multibeings* in this *Corpus*, so as to instruct us how to practice and achieve Enlightenment.

The Four Sacred Wisdoms of Buddha

The Buddha also possesses the *Four Sacred Wisdoms*. Together with the *Three Corpuses*, the *Four Wisdoms* are the most important *Attributes* of the Buddha. This can also work as an acid test to those who claim themselves to be “Living Buddhas” or that they have already attained Buddhahood—you can ask them if they have acquired these qualities as the Buddhas do? If not, they are fakes.

The first of the Buddha’s *Four Wisdoms* is ***The Wisdom of Accomplishment***. This *Wisdom* is acquired from transforming the *First Five Cognizances* into Wisdom: Mundane *Cognizances* are hindrances to Enlightenment; however, by the virtuous power of practicing Buddha Dharma, they can be purified and transformed into *The Wisdom of Accomplishment*. Usually the *First Five Cognizances* are employed merely to deal with the mundane affairs, but after strenuous practice, these *Cognizances* can be transformed into *Ultra-Worldly Wisdom*. By the way, *Transformation* (or Conversion) is one of the most important concepts and techniques in Buddhism—especially in *Mahāyāna Buddhism*. For to the perception of Mahāyāna wisdom, *nothing is actually and ultimately destroyed: in reality, things are only transformed from one condition to another, from bad to good, from useless to useful, or from assembly to disassembly, and vice versa*. That is why the Buddha has been able

to accomplish the *Transformation* of the *First Five Cognizances* into the *Wisdom of Accomplishment*. In addition, He has also transformed the *Sixth Cognizance* into ***The Wisdom of Wondrous Scrutiny***. For ordinary people, the *Sixth Cognizance* is mostly working in a defiled way and tends to make all sorts of faulty and misleading *Differentiations*. But, in the process of the accomplishments of *Ultimate Bodhi*, the *Sixth Cognizance* is transformed into *The Wisdom of Wondrous Scrutiny*, for by this wisdom, one can scrutinize into minute details of things without nurturing any *Attachments*.

The Buddha has also transformed the *Seventh Cognizance*, also called the *Ego Center* or the *Mano Cognizance*, into ***the Wisdom of Equality***. The inherent attribute of the *Seventh Cognizance* is Selfness or *Egotism*, and due to this *Egotism*, we are made to perceive things as two antipodes, which stand opposed to each other; i.e. the Ego (Me) and the Alter (Others), or *the Motivator* and *the Moved*. Therefore, to us, by the functioning of the *Sixth Cognizance*, things are not viewed equally or impartially. However, at the time of the attainment of the *Supreme Bodhi*, this *Ego Center* is purified and transformed into *The Wisdom of Equality*, and the *Ultimate Equality* of all beings and all things can be perceived lucidly and unbiasedly. As a consequence, the mundane delusive *Differentiation* of “you” and “me,” “inner” and “outer,” etc. will be totally and ultimately dismissed and eliminated; instead, the purified Dharmic

Domain of *Non-differentiation* will manifest itself.

Just as the *First Seven Cognizances* are transformed into Wisdoms, the *Eighth Cognizance*—called the *Ālaya Cognizance*—is also transformed into ***The Wisdom of the Grand Round Mirror***. The *Ālaya* used to be like a repertory or storage of all Karmas, but now it has been transformed into a *Mirror* that can reflect things faithfully and lucidly. One can perceive things clearly through it, with no more distortions or twists. This means to say that while it is in use, the *Ālaya* itself would not be tainted or influenced by external Appearances, for it works, just as a mirror: When it reflects external images, the Mirror itself always stays clean, clear, and uncontaminated by the images it reflects. And so *the Grand-Round-Mirror Wisdom* becomes one of the most important *Attributes* of the Buddha—By virtue of this Wisdom, the Buddha can perceive all things and all *Multibeings* distinctly in His profound *Samādhi*: He is able to discern clearly people’s desires, their *Virtuous Roots*, as well as what they should practice to improve; but in the mean time, He is unmoved by any of these, just like a mirror. This is the function and attribute of *the Wisdom of the Grand Round Mirror*. The foregoing have been *the Four Sacred Wisdoms* of Buddhahood.

Other Attributes of Buddha

The Buddha also has other important attributes, upon which we do not have time to go into detail right now, and so I will just mention a few of them by the group titles. They are

The Ten Powers,
The Four Fearlessnesses,
The Four Unobstructable Wisdoms, and
The Eighteen Uncommon Dharmas.

All of these are His attainments in realizing *the Ultimate Bodhi*. So, the word “Buddha” is far from a mere word or an empty name; it signifies tremendously enormous Wisdoms and Virtues. No one can be called Buddha for nothing. Therefore, in one word, *Buddha* signifies *Bodhi*, and *Bodhi* signifies ages and ages of practice and the attainment of innumerable Virtues and Wisdoms, as well as the power to deliver oneself and all *Multibeings*. This is why the Buddha is so precious!

II. The Dharma

The *Buddha Dharma* is precious because it offers us a way to achieve *Enlightenment*. *Dharma* (धर्म) originally means “law.” It is not law in the sense of legal codes, but rather, somewhat in the philosophical sense, for each and every thing in the world has some “laws” to itself that it must follow so as to

preserve and maintain its self-entity—from the tiniest thing like an atom to the grandest thing like a universe. And this is exactly the sense which the Indian philosophers meant when they called everything—either mental, or spiritual, or physical, or what not—*Dharmas*.

For this reason, the Buddha also called His teachings *Dharmas*—for they too follow some particular laws. The *Dharmas* that the Buddha taught include the following *Five Yānas* (or *Five Vehicles*).

1. The *Humanity-Yāna Dharma*
2. The *Deva-Yāna Dharma*
3. The *Sravaka-Yāna Dharma*
4. The *Pratyeka-Yāna Dharma*
5. The *Bodhisattva-Yāna Dharma*

1. The Humanity-Yāna Dharma

In the *Humanity-Yāna Dharma*, the practitioners are supposed to obtain the *Three Refuges* and to observe and practice the *Five Precepts* received from a Buddhist Monk in front of the *Three Gems* (i.e., in a Shrine Hall). According to the *Dharma*, if people practice the *Five Percepts* well, in their next life they can be born as human beings of higher status in society and will be able to enjoy wealth and fame. If, however, their practice is only mediocre, they still can be born in the *Human-*

ity Realm, but for the lack of *Merits*, they will be born only as ordinary individuals. If people do not practice the *Precepts* or practice them poorly by breaking the *Vows*, they will be reborn in the *Lower Realms* (i.e., the *Purgatory*, the *Hungry Ghostkind*, and the *Animalhood*).

The Five Precepts

The Five Precepts are as follows:

(1) *No Killing*

This does not mean that you must become a vegetarian and refrain from eating meat. (No killing and taking vegetarian meals are two things on different categories.) Yet it does mean, however, that you cannot kill *any living beings*, even insects or mice, by means of sprays or traps or other means. You even may not ask others to kill for you—for example, you may not ask your wife to set a mouse trap for you since by Precepts you cannot do it yourself. The reason why you may not kill is that killing is generally motivated by *hate* or *greed*. But a true Buddhist practitioner is not supposed to do anything based on *greed* or *hate*, especially, when the deed is meant to harm someone else. The hate or greed engendered in this way and the deeds so executed will destroy all of your previous *Merits* and *Accomplishments* in practice. Anyone who has made some achieve-

ments in practicing Buddhism, if he is provoked by anger or hate or greed in some occasion, all the Merits acquired in his Mind will *seem to vanish instantaneously*. This is exactly like what the old maxim says: “The fire of hatred or anger can burn down the *Forests of Virtues* that have been cultivated within you.” That is why the Buddha enjoins the Precept of *No Killing* as the First Sacred Law for genuine practitioners.

In Buddhism, we know that all the good deeds are done for our own good as well as for others. By the same token, when the Buddha tells us not to kill, it is not just for the protection of other beings but also *for our own protection*, simply because the act of killing is defiling to our Mind and bad to our *Karma*. Right in the act of killing, you are not only harming another being but also vitiating your own Mind and thereby *exclude yourself from the attainment of Enlightenment*. Ultimately speaking, it is for your own wellbeing or Bodhi that you should not kill!

(2) *No Stealing*

You should not take or remove the belongings of others without their permission. The Karmic effect of stealing is to be born poor or destitute in the next life, for those who rob will lose.

(3) No Inappropriate Sex

For compassion's sake, a good Buddhist practitioner will not have sex with another person unmarried to himself (or herself). This kind of sex is called *Divergent Sex* in Buddhism. The Karmic Retribution of the offences of Divergent Sex in the previous lives is to have an unfaithful spouse, or disharmony or domestic fights all the time.

(4) No Telling Lies

A good practitioner is not supposed to tell any kind of lies—including “white lies”—for all lies are *black* in the perception of Buddhism. In sum, there will be no excuse for any lies, not even in joking.

(5) No Alcoholic Drinks

Liquors or wines are bad for practice, for they can muddle up your Mind and drive you to high emotion and irrationality. Even beers are not allowed, for you can get drunk by drinking beer, too. I must admit that this is pretty tough for Westerners. However, if you are really *sincere* and *serious* about practicing the Dharma and *Enlightenment*, you won't find it so hard to practice these *Precepts* by the book.

These *Precepts* are difficult but ***they are not compulsory***; on the contrary, they should be done on the “voluntary” basis; that is, ***they are taken and observed as the practitioner wishes it—it is up to you to take some or none of them***. You should know that in Buddhism, *every practice is voluntary and personal*. You can decide for yourself when you are *ready* to take a vow of one or more of the *Precepts*—Should you decide to take the *Precepts*, you do not have to take all five of them at the same time. You yourself alone know better when you are *ready* to take the *Precepts*. And beware that, in order to make the *Precepts* that you take to be formally recognized as valid in the *Dharma*, they should be ***transmitted to you by a qualified ordained monk in the Temple in front of a shrine, with a proper ceremony*** during which you make your Vows: you cannot just pronounce yourself to have **conferred to yourself** the *Precepts*! Such is the same as taking the Three Refuges.

2. The Deity-Yāna (Deva-Yāna) Dharma

The *Deity-Yāna* are the *Celestial Beings* who practice the following ***Ten Virtues***:

1. No Killing
2. No Stealing
3. No Divergent Sex
4. No Lying

5. No Slandering
6. No Vulgar Language
7. No Frivolous Speech
8. No Greed
9. No Hatred
10. No Evil Views

Those who practice these well can be reborn as *Deities* or *Celestial Beings*—but this is a rather difficult thing to do. As you can see, it is not easy to be reborn even as a human being again, not to speak of *Deity*; for at present we are all, in a sense, living on the funds of our own “savings account” of *Merits* left from previous lives. And if we do not keep on saving some more by practicing the *Five Precepts*, we will soon run out of funds and will eventually go broke or bankrupt, because of overdrawing. As a result, that is going to bring us down to the Lower Realms in the next life.

3. The Sravaka-Yāna Dharma

The *Sravaka Yāna* is the *Minor Vehicle*. The *Sravakas* practice the *Four Sacred Truths* and the *Eightfold Right Routes*. These practitioners are able to transcend *Reincarnation* after their realization of the Fourth Fruition, the Arhathood. But due to the lack of Compassion, these practitioners are not interested in *delivering* other people; consequently, they usually go into *Nirvāṇa* right after the attainment of Arhathood. And this is

very different from what a Pu-sa or Bodhisattva would do. We will cover this Yāna in a future lecture.

4. The Pratyeka-Yāna Dharma

The Pratyeka-buddha Yāna's practice involves *the Twelve Links of Causality*, and like the Arhats, they are not interested in *delivering* people: their sole interest is their own *Liberation*. And so, together with the *Sravakas*, they are called the *Duo-Vehicles*.

5. The Bodhisattva-Yāna Dharma

The *Bodhisattva Yāna* (बोधिसत्त्वयान) practitioners practice *the Six Pāramitas* (परमि or *Deliverances*) and *the Four Appealing Wisdoms*. These items will be covered in future lectures as well.

The Buddha used to instruct different Yānas of Dharma to different people according to their temperaments, capacities, and spiritual conditions. If a person has the temperament and *caliber* of a Bodhisattva, the Buddha will teach him the *Bodhisattva Yāna Dharma*. If he is of an ordinary capacity, then the Buddha will teach him the *Humanity Yāna Dharma*.

Nevertheless, even the *Humanity Yāna Dharma* is no easy matter as you can see. The difficult part about Buddhism is that it requires practice in real acts, not merely in talking, discussing and understanding, like most worldly philosophies or learnings would do—Ten tons of *talking* can not replace an ounce of *practice*.

Even though the Buddha instructed *Five-Yāna Dharmas*, yet the accomplishments of the Buddha himself go far beyond the *Five Yānas*. That is why at Buddha's time, even though ***the Sravaka Saints who had long attained Great Arhatship still remained to follow the Buddha and kept learning from Him zealously throughout their lives. In addition, even the most accomplished ones of the Bodhisattvas also do the same thing: they kept learning under the Buddha all the time. Therefore, do not mistake the Buddha for an Arhat or Great Arhat, or vice versa:*** in fine, the Buddha is *the Master*, and the Arhats *the disciples*. As for ordinary people like us, who are aspired to attain *Enlightenment* in the future, we must begin to follow the teachings of *Buddha Dharma* as soon as possible; and we should start from doing Lesson One: No Killing, and so on.

All of the *Dharmas* taught by the Buddha are for the sake of *Emotive Beings* (or *Multibeings*)—beings that are endowed with *life, emotions and feelings*, for they are capable of practicing and attaining *Enlightenment*. We must always bear this in mind: when we practice the *No Killing Precept*, we must try hard *not to kill any Emotive Being for the sake of Non-sentient beings*.

For instance, we should not apply an insecticide to kill any insects (which are *Emotive Beings*) in order to save a plant (which is a *Non-sentient being*), for the lives of the *Emotive Beings* are much more valuable than an inanimated plant, for only the former can practice wisdom and attain Buddhahood.

Of the *Three Gems*, the *Dharma* is the most important one. It is due to the practice on the *Dharma* that enables a Bodhisattva to attain Buddhahood. Furthermore, the purpose that the Buddha comes to this world is *to impart the Dharma to all Multibeings*. In the meantime, the purpose of our getting together here right now is also to learn the *Dharma*. And concerning learning the *Dharma*, there is a very significant principle in Buddha's Teaching: "*Don't follow the person, follow the Dharma.*" Whoever has the *Dharma*, you should follow him. Don't concern yourself with the Guru's status or appearance or some other matters in the worldly life, the only important thing is whether or not he is good at the *Dharma*—If he is, follow him, for *Dharma's* sake!

The *Dharma*, however, will not come to you of its own accord; you should go and request and learn from the Master, who is supposed to be a qualified member of the *Samgha* (i.e., an *Ordained* Buddhist Priest). Due to our impure Karmas in the past, we are unable to meet with the Buddha in person and acquire His teachings directly—but we still can receive teach-

ings from the *Samgha*, who are ordained to work as a “deputy” or “emissary” of the Buddha to propagate the Dharma, so that the Dharma can be passed down from one generation to another to benefit innumerable *Multibeings*.

III. The Samgha

There are two kinds of Samgha—the *Ordinary Samgha* and the *Saintly Samgha*. In its origin, the word “*Samgha*” (संघ) means an assembly, especially of people. *Samgha* also means “harmony.” Thus, all together, in Buddhism *Samgha* denotes an assembly of at least four people, either secular or ordained, who can practice the *Dharma* in harmony. But in later usage, the *Samgha* comes to mean specifically the ***Buddhist priests*** (monks and nuns) of all levels, ***excluding lay adherents***. Therefore, as a lay person, you had better not say that you are “a member of the *Samgha*,” or that your group of meditation is a “*Samgha*.”

Nowadays, the term “*Ordinary Samgha*” means the priests who have not yet attained *Buddhahood* or Sainthood. The “*Holy Samgha*” refers to the holy priests who have achieved *Enlightenment* in Bodhisattvaship, but not yet on the level of *Buddhahood*. However, in a broader sense, the *Saintly Samgha* also includes the *Sravaka* and *Pratyeka* Saints.

The fact that the *Ordinary Saṃghas* are not on the equal status with the *Holy Saṃgha* does not mean that they are not qualified to be our Gurus. As a drowning man will cling to any small piece of drifting wood in order to keep himself afloat on the surface of the stream, so the practitioner could grasp and use the *Ordinary Saṃgha* as a piece of driftwood (even if it is not as good as a boat) in *the torrential River of Transmigration* toward the *Ultimate Enlightenment*. Therefore, *Ordinary Saṃghas* are useful and indispensable to people who are aspired to practice for *Enlightenment*.

TAKING THE REFUGE

When we say that we *Take Refuge* under the *Three Gems*, what do we exactly mean by the term *Refuge*? *Refuge* signifies shelter, protection, and guidance. To *Take Refuge* means that you wish ***to become a Buddhist formally and in public*** and to receive guidance in the *Dharma*. There are no other obligations involved in taking the *Refuge* except that you cannot practice other religions from now on. Besides, you are *not required* to take the *Five Precepts* at the time of Refuge-taking: It is

only after you feel yourself ready, especially after thorough study and understanding of the Precepts, and after a period of practice on them on your own, and feeling comfortable with the practice, then you can request to take the *Vow* for the practice of the *Precepts*—but you do not have to take all five of them at once, either. You may take one *Precept* now, and then another one after a period of time; you can take all the time you need to make yourself fully ready to do so.

To *Take Refuge* is likened to get a Birth Certificate—it signifies that you are a Reborn (or New-born) child into the *Buddha Dharma*. It is also similar to enrolling in a university. After you are enrolled, if you choose to be a part-time student and take just a few courses, you can do it so long as you do not mind being put off in your “graduation” (i.e., the *Enlightenment*). If, on the other hand, you wish to sign up for a full load of courses and work hard on it, you will graduate much sooner. How you are going to take your courses (practice) after your Enrollment (*Taking the Refuge*) it is totally up to you! Of course, you can consult with your Master and follow his suggestions, just as you would listen to the opinions of your adviser at college. And Buddhism is a Great College of Enlightenment, with the *Buddha* as your Chancellor, the *Samgha* as your professors, the *Buddha Dharma* as your textbooks, and the fellow practitioners as your TA’s and schoolmates.

- Lecture given on 5/13/1989
at Chuang Yen Monastery, N.Y.
- Revised on 3/15/1999
at Americana Buddhist Temple,
Howell, Michigan, USA
- 2nd Revision on 1/17/2002
at Maha-vairocana Temple,
Taipei, Taiwan
- 5th Revision on 8/5/2002
at Americana Buddhist Temple,
Howell, Michigan, USA

【APPENDIX 1】

The Ritual for Conferring the Three Refuges

(三皈依儀規)

(N.B. This Ritual must be conducted by
a qualified Ordained Buddhist Priest)

Translated by Ven. Cheng Kuan

I. THE FIVE INQUIRIES

(Question and response 3 times over)

1. Have you ever killed your own father?
2. Have you ever killed your own mother?
3. Have you ever killed an Arhat?
4. Have you ever made a Buddha bleed in the attempt of killing Him?
5. Have you ever disrupted the harmony of a Saṃgha?

[If not, you are eligible to take the Three Refuges and become a Buddhist formally.]

(Since these five sins are the most heinous ones in the world, the sinner's mind and behavior are too vicious and defiled to practice the precious Dharma, and so they are not eligible to take the Three Refuges.)

II. THE INVOCATIONS OF THE HOLIES

A. Invoking the Buddhas (3 times, 3 prostrations)

With incense and flowers to invite,
With incense and flowers to greet,
I, (Dharma Name, as conferred by the Master Priest of
Refuge), with all my heart,
Here do invoke our Root Gūru Sakyamuni Buddha,
Amitabha Buddha of the West Universe, the on-
coming Buddha Maitreya, and all the Buddhas of
all the Universes,
In the hope that you will fulfil your former Vows,
So as to condescend to come to this Dharma Assembly,
To bear witness to this Ritual of Refuge-taking.

B. Invoking the Dharma (3 times, 3 prostrations)

With incense and flowers to invite,
With incense and flowers to greet,
I, (Dharma Name), with all my heart,
Here do invoke all the Precepts of the Major and Minor
Vehicles, the Twelve Categories of Buddha Doctrines,
and all the pure, desire-free, most profound Dharmas,
With an unperturbed mind,
Here do I seek Refuge and pay my homage.

C. Invoking the Saṃgha (3 times, 3 prostrations)

With incense and flowers to invite,
 With incense and flowers to greet,
 I, (Dharma Name), with all my heart,
 Here do invoke, Kuan-Yin, Manjushri, Pu-Hsien, Terra-
 Treasure, and all the other great Bodhisattvas,
 as well as the Venerable Vināya Patriarch Upali, all the
 Patriarchs in India and China,
 all the great Vinaya Masters of the Nan-Shan School,
 and all the founders of great Monasteries,
 In the hope that you will fulfil your Vows
 So as to condescend to come to this Dharma Assembly,
 To bear witness to this Ritual of Refuge-taking.

**D. Invoking the Celestial Protectors of the
 Dharma** (3 times, 3 bows only—*no prostrations*)

With incense and flowers to invite,
 With incense and flowers to greet,
 I, (Dharma Name), with all my heart,
 Here do invoke all the Celestial Deities—Brahmaṇa,
 Indra, the Four Heavenly Kings, Gods, Dragons, and
 the Eight Categories of Spirits, Protectors of
 Temples, Earth Gods, Protectors of Precepts, Vajras,
 and all the Deities,
 In the hope that you will fulfil your Vows
 To condescend to come to this Dharma Assembly,
 So as to uphold and protect the Vināya.

III. REPENTING IMPEDIMENTAL, EVIL KARMAS

(High kneeling, with palms joined, 3 times, 3 prostrations)

A. The Repenting Quatrain

All my bad Karmas done in the past,
Were resulted from timeless Greed, Hate, and Ignorance.
Engendered in the Body, Speech and Mind,
All of these, I now do sincerely repent.

B. The Seven Buddhas' Dhārani for Cleansing the Karmas

(High kneeling, with palms joined, 3 times)

Lipo Lipode, Kuha kuhate, Dharanite, Nihorate,
Virinide, Māhāgade, Jenin Kente, Suā-Hā.

IV. TAKING THE THREE REFUGES

(High kneeling, with palms joined, 3 times, 3 prostrations)

(a) I, (Dharma Name), hereby do take Refuge under the
Buddha to the end of my life, never to take refuge under
Extraneous Wayers or Celestial Māras;

I, (Dharma Name), hereby do take Refuge under
the Dharma to the end of my life, never to take refuge
under Extraneous-Way teachings;

I, (Dharma Name), hereby do take Refuge under
the Saṃgha to the end of my life, never to take refuge
under Extraneous-way adherents;

With Master (the Master Priest's Name) as my Gūru,
And Buddha, the Thus-Adventist of the Supreme Bodhi
as my Bhagāvan,
And all these are made possible due to (great) Compassion.
[3 times, 3 prostrations]

(b) I, (Dharma Name), have now taken Refuges under
the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṃgha,

From this time onward, to the end of my life
I will be a follower of the Three Treasurable Ones—
With Master (the Master Priest's Name) as my Gūru,
And Buddha, the Thus-Adventist of the Supreme Bodhi
as my Bhagāvan,
All these are made possible due to (great) Compassion.
[3 times, 3 prostrations]

V. DEDICATIONAL VOWS

The Four Grand Vows Of All Bodhisattvas

(Kneel to repeat, 3 times, 3 prostrations)

I vow to deliver innumerable Multibeings to the shore of
Nirvāṇa;

I vow to eliminate the uncountable Vexations and Disturbances
in my Mind;

I vow to learn and practice the boundless Buddha
Dharmas;

I vow to accomplish the Unrivaled, Supreme Buddha
Route.

[End of Ritual]

【 APPENDIX 2 】

About the Author

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- 楞伽經義貫 *A Commentary on Lankavatara Sūtra*. (Chinese Version. Mahāyāna Vihara Publ., Taipei, 1990)
- *The Sweet Dews of Ch'an*. 禪之甘露 (First Edition, Torch of Wisdom Publ., Taipei, 1990; Second Edition, Vairocana Publ. Co., Taipei, 1995; Third Revised Edition, Vairocana Publ. Co., Taipei, 2002)
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- Lecturer of Tse-Ming Buddhist Research Institute, Ten Thousand Buddhas Temple, Taichung, Taiwan. (1994-95)
- Guest Lecturer to Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston. (1988)
- Buddhist Canon Teacher and Tai-Chi Chuan Teacher, Chuang Yen Monastery, Carmel, New York. (1988-89)
- President and Teacher, Lanka Buddhist Association, Dallas, Texas. (1987-88)
- Sūtra Translator, Institute of Advanced Studies of World Religions, Brookstone, New York.
- Three year's Buddhist Retreat (March,1984 - May,1987)
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登記處：行政院新聞局局版台業字第 5259 號

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承印者：田園城市文化事業有限公司

版次：佛曆 2546 年(2002 年 9 月)地藏聖誕日初版敬印一千冊

國際書碼：ISBN 957-9373-16-7

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